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THE RED SENTINEL OF MONT BLANC.

BY F. S. SMYTHE.

To a mountaineer an Alpine peak is something more than a mass of rock, snow, and ice rising to inhospitable altitudes, and however much those who gaze from below may rhapsodise at beauty of form, grace of outline, and richness of colouring, they cannot experience the feelings of the climber setting forth to the attack; his doubts and fears; the fierce joy of conquest; the downwards glimpse through a breaking mist; the relaxation of taut muscles and strung nerves on the summit.

A great peak is only to be wooed and won after much preparation, toil, and oftimes tribulation, and it is hardly surprising, therefore, to find in the caprices of mountains a close analogy to human nature. There are lucky mountains and unlucky mountains, mountains that repulse and mountains that welcome, beautiful mountains and ugly mountains. Let those without superstition defy the Zmutt ridge of the Matterhorn, and those who believe in luck and not probability the stone-swept couloir of the Col du Lion.

This temperamentality of mountains may be summed up in one word—weather; and of all Alpine peaks Mont Blanc is the most temperamental. I remember well the words of an old and famous guide.

"Ah, monsieur," he said, "there are many mountains, but only one Mont Blanc. He is king of all, but cruel and fickle; in the morning he may smile, but in the afternoon he may kill you."

The tourist, accompanied by guides, who ascends Mont Blanc in good weather by the ordinary snow route from Chamonix *viâ* the Grands Mulets, may return with the idea that the mountain is an easy snow

promenade; but let him be caught on the summit ridge, or the complicated upper snowfields, by one of the sudden storms that approach with but little warning, and he will have a very different story to tell—a story of roaring hurricane charged with numbing cold, paralysing to body and brain, suffocating wind-driven snow writhing in furious 'tourmente,' and a slow plod plod for hours through a blankness where naught is visible. Under these conditions it is fatally easy for the most experienced mountaineers to diverge from the correct route, and many men despairing of finding the way, and tired of placing one foot before another, have sat down to rest—and died.

Yet sometimes the forces of unrest are stilled, and one may sit on the summit with only the faintest of zephyrs whispering by, and a glorious sun blazing from a sky of deepest indigo blue.

Thus Mont Blanc by the ordinary way—a route by which any able-bodied man may under fair conditions, and with guides, gain the Alps' highest summit. Modern mountaineering, seeking to exercise its skill, has invented many alternative ways, until it seemed that every possible route had been made up the mountain.

As was the case elsewhere among the Alps, Englishmen played a great part in opening up the routes on Mont Blanc, and two of the finest mountaineering expeditions in the world, the Pétéret and Brenva ridges, were first ascended by Englishmen and their guides. The traverse of the Pétéret ridge, first made by the late Mr Eccles and his guides, is now regarded as the blue riband of mountaineering achievement; whilst the Brenva route, the classic snow and ice expedition of the Alps—conquered more than sixty years ago by Messrs Moore, Walker, and Matthews and their guides,—has since been immortalised by Mr A. E. W. Mason in 'Running Water.'

All these routes lie up the southern Italian face of Mont Blanc, grandest of all Alpine mountainsides, which rises above the meadows of Courmayeur and the Val Veni in 12,000 feet of shattered glaciers, savage precipices, and icy steeps. So great is the scale of these ridges, that the time necessary to overcome the climbs is reckoned not in hours but in days, and the possibility of bad weather overtaking a party high up is one to be seriously considered.

Mountaineering exacts its toll, and this great side of Mont Blanc has claimed valuable lives. Professor Balfour, F.R.S., was killed with his guide, Petrus, in an attempt on the Aiguille Blanche de Pétéret; H. O. Jones, his wife, and guide, Truffer, were killed on the Aiguille Rouge de Pétéret; and lastly, that splendid young Swiss mountaineer, Willy Richardet, was killed by falling stones in 1925 on the Aiguille

Blanche de Pétéret, while retreating in bad weather and thick mist.

Dr G. Graham Macphee of Ulverston and I have vivid recollections of our traverse of the Aiguille Blanche de Pétéret in an attempt without guides on Mont Blanc by the Pétéret ridge; for we were overtaken by the same storm that inflicted widespread damage by cloudburst in lower Switzerland and the Italian Lakes on 11th August 1927. It is impossible to describe such weather at an altitude of 13,000 feet, and it was only by climbing continuously for sixteen hours without a halt that we were able to fight our way down to safety. As it was, our total time from Courmayeur was no less than thirty-six hours—a time which may convey some idea of the length of these expeditions on the southern flanks of Mont Blanc.

With the ascent of the Innominata face, which is enclosed between the Bruillard and Pétéret ridges, by the Gugliamina brothers and Signor Ravelli in 1921, it appeared as though every possible route had been wrested from Mont Blanc. But one section—the greatest of all—remained inviolable. This was the south-east face, which is bounded by Brenva ridge to the east, and the Pétéret ridge to the west. So impregnable is it in appearance, that prior to 1927 not one single attempt had been made upon it. There is indeed no Alpine face, not even the eastern precipices of Monte Rosa, to compare with this grand wall of rock and ice, which rises in a final sweep of 5300 feet at an average angle of over 50° from the upper basin of the Brenva Glacier.

Many were those who had gazed upon it from the well-known tourist highway of the Col du Géant; some even had planned, and Mr G. W. Young tells me that he and the late Mr G. H. L. Mallory, who perished on Mount Everest, examined a possible route; it was an ambition of Dr Preuss, most skilful of the younger generation of German mountaineers, who was later killed in the Eastern Alps; Dr Güssfeldt had studied it, and so had others; but with one exception no one had actually ventured upon the face. The exception was the late Mr A. F. Mummery's party, who diverged from the ordinary Brenva route to the left, and after cutting steps for many hours in hard ice were forced to retreat. Their route was, however, but a variation of the Brenva route, and later inspection has shown that its continuation is impossible on account of the formidable 200 feet high ice wall which protects the brow of Mont Blanc. Professor Norman Collie, F.R.S., who was a member of the party, tells me that what impressed him most was the extraordinary steepness of the ice-swept couloirs which seam the face. It was undoubtedly the threat of the impending wall of ice running along the crest of the face

that prevented any attempt being made.

The mountaineer spends the winter in eating dinners and making plans for the summer, and such is the optimism engendered by assimilation of the former that the latter are invariably made assuming perfect weather. It is a rash assumption, and my first visit to the range of Mont Blanc accompanied by Mr T. B. Blakeney in June 1927 was fraught with two weeks of the most continuously foul weather that I have experienced.

There was little that we could do, save to trudge up to the Col de Géant and gaze regretfully at Mont Blanc scowling beneath a mantle of ashen "tourmente."

Previously Blakeney had suggested the possibility of an attack on the south-east face, and we had plotted routes on photographs, but my first view of the face plastered with snow and ice confirmed a certain scepticism for the project.

We retreated to Chamonix in tempest, snow, hail, rain—every weapon Mont Blanc thought fit to utilise to the completion of our discomfiture, — and returned to England. During a fortnight's holiday we had not climbed a peak or crossed a pass.

But in spite of Mont Blanc's ungenerosity, I conceived a fascination for the great peak. The Oberland I know and love, Tyrol has always charmed, the Engadine and the Zermatt giants I shall return to, but "There is only one Mont Blanc. He is king of all——" And all that is finest in mountain architecture and mountaineering is to be found on the range he rules.

In July I returned to the attack, and in company with Dr R. O. Ward and Mr G. S. Bower, ascended the Brenva route without guides.

The weather had improved a little since June, but was unsettled enough to cause anxiety on every long climb. We were lucky on the Brenva, and laboured up its interminable slopes under a grilling sun. Owing to the snowy nature of the summer the ice, which usually necessitates much tedious step-cutting, was overlaid with good snow, and instead of straddling the well-known ice ridge à cheval, as did Mr A. E. W. Mason's hero, we were able to walk upon its crest. It is exceedingly sharp nevertheless, and we moved along, with our "Eckenstein" crampons carefully implanted at every step and toes pointed out, not unlike a procession of Charlie Chaplins.

It was the condition of the snow which prompted reconsideration of the south-east face. If this snow which lay uniformly on the Brenva route extended along the whole mountainside, there might well be justification in an assault. But, as always, thought and imagination would be brought to a dead stop against the final ice wall defending the summit of Mont Blanc. To reach it, after per-

haps two days of difficult and exacting climbing, and then have to return was unthinkable.

As August wore on storm succeeded storm with monotonous regularity, and one by one my friends returned to the even more doubtful humours of the British climate. It was at this stage, when everything seemed against any attempt on the climb on which I had now set my heart, that I was fortunate in discovering that Professor T. Graham Brown, F.R.S., who was also climbing with the Montenvers Hotel as his centre, was able and willing to stay on until the middle of September, if necessary. I accordingly suggested that we should join forces in an attempt to scale the south-east face, and I was more than delighted when he agreed to do so. Indeed, I soon found that he shared my enthusiasm for this unclimbed side of Mont Blanc, and had examined it from the Col du Géant.

But as day after day passed, and the high peaks whitened and whitened under the merciless lash of the blizzards, our spirits wilted with the enforced inactivity. We were reduced to planning desperate ascents on the peaks, traced out by the hotel barograph. Helped by a judicious bang the unfortunate instrument would always rise nobly to the occasion, only to sink lower than before. The other relaxation was the rotary gambling machine—a remarkable source of revenue to the proprietor. My friend, Mr J. H. B. Bell of Auchtermuchty, Fife, had, I should add, previously spent a considerable time in working out the odds on every colour, and finding them heavily in favour of the machine, wisely resisted its blandishments.

On 21st August a temporary clearance in the weather tempted us up the Petite Aiguille Verte, an easy peak of 11,400 feet. Deep new snow covered everything, and a biting wind whirled stinging spiculæ of ice in our faces. Winter appeared to have come into her own, and our pessimism, born of much disappointment, decreed weeks of good weather to put Mont Blanc into safe climbing condition. The weather on the 22nd again brought discouragement, which was confirmed by even worse weather on the 23rd, when new snow lay on the veranda of the Montenvers Hotel, and the last visitors of the season went shivering down to Chamonix.

There appeared no alternative but ignominious retreat to England or the Italian Lakes. Our position resembled that of two swains mooning around the skirts of a mistress who repulsed with every weapon of primitive savagery. At this crucial stage Graham Brown was seized with a brilliant idea. We could at least go for a walking tour on the lower hills to the west of Mont Blanc, until such time as the mountain thought fit to receive us. The idea was good, for anything was better to moun-

taineers in training than the languors of the Italian Lakes or the leaden skies of Britain, and the same day saw us strolling leisurely over the pleasant pastures between Sallanches and Mégève.

We spent the night at the latter village, and for the first time that season found ourselves in an hotel that was not monopolised by our fellow-countrymen. The prices, too, were a revelation after the cosmopolitan tariffs of Chamonix. At dinner we were entertained by a swarthy Italian minstrel who accompanied himself well on a mandoline. He sang Neapolitan songs in a rich tenor, and wound up with the traditional "Funiculi funicula," in which the audience, forgetting their dinner, joined lustily. After dinner we were amused by a strolling acrobat, and our eardrums sorely tried by his small daughter, who sang in a piercing falsetto. Those who tire of the Anglicised table d'hôtes of Chamonix or Zermatt should visit these charming uplands and quaint old villages to the west of Mont Blanc.

It rained hard next day, but we were by now well inured, and trudged over the hills to the south-west of Mégève. But as the day drew on, the mist drooped low upon the grassy hills, a mournful wind sobbed through the dripping pines, and the rain descended in a deluge worthy of Cumberland. To escape a complete soaking we sought shelter in a deserted cattle hut, and spent a warm night in its snug hay-loft, which, strangely enough, harboured neither mice, rats, nor fleas.

The weather improved the following morning, and as we tramped over the gentle pine-clad ridges, the clouds to the east were drawn back as though from some titanic stage, to reveal Mont Blanc aloof and stately in a sky of ominous steely blue. Later it rained again, but not maliciously, and in the golden calm of a perfect evening we descended to the little village of la Giettaz, on the southern slopes of the Col des Aravis.

For some reason we both felt unaccountably depressed. Perhaps the village itself is depressing in situation, lying as it does at the entrance to a gloomy gorge, and girt around by lofty craggy hills, whose abrupt precipices are darkly stained as though the mountains' life-blood had oozed from their veins. Edgar Allan Poe would have found inspiration in the old post inn. Never had we stayed in so dismal an habitation. No one spoke, and black-cowled monks from the neighbouring monastery crept noiselessly about on their sandals. Most mysterious of all, the bells and clocks struck not once but twice.

In spite of an excellent dinner and a bottle of good vintage wine, we went to bed behind a locked and barricaded door. Once I awoke from a horrid dream to hear the deep-toned

monastery bell strike midnight, each reverberating boom echoing solemnly around the encircling hills, followed by a minute's silence and repetition.

We laughed at our unreasonable fears next morning, and set off in drenching rain to the inn on the Col des Aravis; but we did not laugh when we reached the inn and learnt from a newspaper of the disaster on the Montenvers railway, in which twenty-three persons lost their lives. It is strange that the accident occurred in phase with our extraordinary feeling of depression during the evening that we spent at the "Sinister Inn," as we called it.

The same evening that we arrived at the Col des Aravis we watched Mont Blanc disentangle itself from a cloudy drapery and sink peacefully into a cold bath of stars. We did not then know that two parties, consisting altogether of five men, had been done to death by a blizzard the same day. Of these Dr Grünwald and Herr Bischof, whom I had previously met at Courmayeur, were actually spending their climbing holiday on the range of Mont Blanc with the object, unknown to us, of attempting the south-east face. Uncertain weather had forced the abandonment of their scheme, and they had crossed Mont Blanc by a conventional route to Chamonix, only to lose their lives on the Aiguille de Bionnassay. The other party of three young Italians disappeared in endeavouring to traverse the Col du Géant. The irony of their fate lay in the fact that they were remonstrated with, and every attempt was made to prevent them from starting; but they declared that if they did not return to Italy within a stipulated time they would be liable to imprisonment and loss of nationality. High mountains care little for State regulations, and Mont Blanc exacted the ultimate penalty on these three unfortunate young men. Their bodies remained undiscovered, and lie hidden in the ice of the "Glacier of the Giant."

On 29th August we returned to Chamonix in perfect weather, to find the town burying the dead of the railway disaster. As we walked up to the Montenvers Hotel we stopped to examine the wreck of the train.

Just below the hotel the railway bends round over an S-shaped viaduct, and it was from the second bend of the S that the train left the metals. The gradient is steep at this point—about 1 : 8—and the acceleration of the train must have been terrific once the cog-wheels of the engine mounted out of the rack. The maximum speed of the trains on the line is nine kilometres per hour, and this speed is governed by an automatic braking arrangement on the locomotive. The latter utilises its steam as a brake on the descent by compressing it in the cylinders against the movement of the pistons. The driver, however, accidentally turned on full

steam ahead instead of reversing the steam flow, with the result that the automatic braking arrangement, unable to withstand the sudden strain, broke down and the two cog-wheels mounted out of the centrally placed rack, enabling the train to career down completely out of control.

Once the cog-wheels had disengaged from the rack the driver was powerless, and there was nothing left for him to do to avert catastrophe.

Owing to rain and snow the blinds in both the coaches were securely fastened down, and none of the passengers were able to jump out to safety. The fireman saved himself, as did also the conductor of the first coach; the driver bravely remained at his post and was killed. The conductor of the second coach could have saved himself also, but instead he crawled along the footboard of his coach, uncoupled it from the first coach, crawled back again, and putting on the brake pulled the coach up as it was about to follow the fore part of the train over the edge of the viaduct. For this act of surpassing courage and promptitude of mind he was awarded the Legion of Honour.

The engine left the rails, as already stated, at the second bend of the S-shaped viaduct, and plunged through the parapet, dragging with it the first coachful of passengers. The drop at that point is about thirty feet on to the steep boulder-strewn mountain-side, and the coach was practically dashed to pieces upon a large pointed boulder.

The weather was now perfect; there was not a cloud in the sky, and best of all the north wind—a sure sign of fair weather in the Alps—was blowing. At last we had the conditions for our climb.

Four days provisions at least were necessary, and we spent a long time in cutting down the weight of food and equipment to the absolute minimum. Every article and luxury that was not an essential was ruthlessly ejected from our rucksacks, with the one exception of a small camera, until our burdens were reduced to a weight of some thirty pounds per man.

On the afternoon of 30th August we walked up the Mer de Glâce to the Réquin hut. The weather was beautiful that evening, and we stood long outside the hut watching the calm passage of sunset along the peaks. Two other Englishmen, Mr E. V. Slater and Mr G. S. Sansom, were also stopping at the hut, and we enjoyed a pleasant evening in their company.

We slept but little, not on account of the excitement that always precedes a great climb, but because of torture from innumerable fleas and insects of even lower orders, and we were thankful to leave the hut at an early hour and trudge up the Géant Glacier to the inn on the Col du Géant.

The weather was irreproach-

able, but the north wind kept us moving briskly until the sun smiled from over the Dent du Géant.

We sat down to second breakfast under the rocks of the Vierge, the lonely "Virgin" who stands watch and ward over the snowfields of the Géant Glacier. A little distance away a large party of men were wandering, apparently aimlessly, among the labyrinth of crevasses. We could not understand their object, until we suddenly realised that they were searching for the three lost Italians.

From the point where we halted, the upper portion of Mont Blanc's south-east face was in full view over the intermediate crest of the Tour Ronde ridge. Long and earnestly we studied it through the small but excellent monocular carried by Graham Brown.

Could the 200 feet high ice wall running across the brow of the mountain be surmounted or turned? Unless we were assured that there was some possibility of overcoming it, we were resolved not to attempt the climb. In such circumstances it would degenerate from legitimate mountaineering to a gamble, and mountains have no sympathy with the gambler. But, as we gazed, we were overjoyed to see that at one point the wall petered out into a smooth unbroken ice slope—the sole breach in the fortification. "But the decision," wrote Graham Brown in his private account of the climb, "must rest with the larger telescope at the Torino hut. Not the final decision—that must be left to the process of trial and error—*absit omen*. . . ."

We arrived at the inn at 10.15 A.M., and occupied the remainder of the morning and most of the afternoon in careful examination of the visible part of our route.

A magnificent couloir descends from under the summit of Mont Blanc to the most westerly bay of the Upper Brenva Glacier. High up, this couloir is split into two arms by a bending rock ridge. The right fork of the Y so formed is comparatively short. The ridge ends above in the steep ice slopes beneath the point where the ice wall is breached. In order to reach the bending ridge we must traverse across the foot of the right-hand branch couloir to the lower extremity of the bending ridge. Thence it looked possible to follow the ridge up to the point where the upper ice slopes appeared feasible. Through the telescope these upper ice slopes seemed of an easy angle, but the telescope lied to us. Once on the bending ridge, however, we should be safe from the avalanches of ice and stones that sweep down the two couloirs on either side of it. But the branch couloir *must* be crossed early if we were not to run the gauntlet from these ice and stone avalanches, which the sun would detach as soon as it touched the upper part of the mountain. To do this a

secure bivouac place as high as possible was essential, and to discover this bivouac was our problem for the morrow.

All the afternoon we were faced by that terrible view: the enormous ramparts of the Pétéret ridge to Mont Blanc de Courmayeur, the Italian summit of Mont Blanc, and the 5300 feet wall of Mont Blanc sweeping round to the Col de la Brenva. How cold and repelling it looked when the sun had left it, and the fear of it sank into both of us. Had one of us weakened then, the resolution of both would have failed, but neither of us liked to voice his fears to the other. We tore ourselves away, and passing round to the other side of the hut, rested our minds on the sunny prospect of green hills stretching away at the foot, and the afternoon light changing imperceptibly to gold on the distant snows of Monte Rosa. So the day passed, with not a solitary cloud pennon to usher it out.

We slept comfortably in real beds until we were awakened at 2.30 A.M. by the hateful clamour of an alarm clock. Glum and silent we ate the breakfast the obliging and kindly proprietor prepared for us, packed our rucksacks, strapped on our "Eckenstein" crampons, and at 3.30 A.M. stepped out into the night.

There was no moon, and far beneath the lights of Courmayeur blinked in feeble contrast to the ghostly banner of the Milky Way drawn across the breadth of Heaven.

In order to approach the foot of Mont Blanc, it was necessary to cross the Tour Ronde ridge to the west of the Tour Ronde and descend to the upper basin of the Brenva Glacier. The Col du Trident, by which we intended to traverse the ridge, is itself a first-class expedition, and had provided me with a stiff bout of step-cutting in steep hard ice on the occasion when I had ascended the Brenva route. We had, therefore, many hours of hard work in front of us before we reached the foot of our climb.

According to doctors a man's vitality is lowest in the hours immediately preceding dawn, and the majority of deaths and suicides occur then. With this theory I entirely concur. More will power and mental effort is required by the mountaineer at this period than at any other. There should be a feeling of excitement and elation at the thought of what the day may bring forth, and there are those who pretend that they experience it, in much the same way that the recruit pretends a love of battle. Personally I tramp behind a lantern apathetically, marvelling at the incredible folly of mountaineering in general and myself in particular. But after an hour or so of slogging along the brain awakens to a sense of responsibility to the body, and I gradually begin to take an interest in my surroundings.

The snow was soft and the wind warm as we breasted the Col des Flambeaux, and struck over the western bay of the

Géant Glacier towards the Col du Trident. The snow became ever softer as we progressed, and soon, from merely stamping a track, we were sinking in up to our knees at every step.

We waded on until we realised the immense time and labour involved in reaching the Col du Trident. We sat down hopelessly in the end; there was little to be done or said, and it was certain that we must postpone the climb. But at all events we were determined on obtaining a view of the lower part of our route, and with this object in view decided to spend the whole day, if needful, in ascending to the crest of the Tour Ronde ridge, the nearest point of which was the Aiguille de Toule immediately above us.

It was still very dark, and as the ice we must cross looked considerably crevassed, we decided to await the dawn.

The next hour of sitting on the snow was the dreariest that I have ever spent on a mountain. All our hopes had been dashed by this unexpected contretemps of soft snow, all our preparations seemed to have been made in vain; for who could expect the fine weather to continue to hold out indefinitely, and even the ever wonderful dawn tinge on the peaks was dismissed with a contemptuous snarl.

At last it was light enough to see, and we proceeded uphill towards the Aiguille de Toule.

We gained the peak without difficulty, but found that we must ascend to the summit of the Tour Ronde to obtain a satisfactory view of Mont Blanc. Seated on slabs of gneiss rock we munched our second breakfast; with the coming of the sun our grumpiness evaporated, and we set off in better spirits for the Tour Ronde.

The Tour Ronde is beset on this, the eastern side, by an extensive sore of rotten rock, which is eating into the very vitals of the mountain, and scarcely did a minute pass but a mass was detached to thunder down to the Géant Glacier. We gave the locality a wide berth, for many tons fall daily, and the peak was visibly and continually rotting before our eyes.

A steep ice slope of considerable length leads up to the eastern ridge of the Tour Ronde, but our sharp crampons, helped by the well-cut steps of a former party, saved us much labour with the ice-axe.

As we topped the ridge Mont Blanc burst upon us in all its magnificence. Far beneath the riven Brenva Glacier crawls down to the meadows of the Val Veni. All day long and all night its shattered ice-falls rage at the imperious behest of gravity, and the grumble of their discontent echoes sullenly around the gaunt precipices that enclose them. Higher up the glacier relents, and at the head of the ice-falls is a little bay of snow, set like a peaceful strand 'twixt the frozen ice-billows and the huge face behind.

To the right of the great couloir, at the point where it narrows, a conspicuous red buttress projects from the face.

It looked perpendicular, and we were at once assured that here—at its base—was the ideal situation for our bivouac. Not only was it placed in an exactly suitable position for a rapid traverse of the branch couloir early in the morning, but it appeared to offer the only completely safe site for a bivouac on the whole of the south-east face of Mont Blanc. Everywhere else was likely to be swept by ice-avalanches from the fringe of hanging glaciers and ice-walls above.

Two routes to the foot of it appeared possible. The first, by an upward traverse from the little col at the foot of the Brenva ridge; the second, directly from below. In either case this small col, which we have since named Col Moore in honour of the first conqueror of the Brenva route, must previously be reached. This red buttress is the key to the climb; without its friendly protection the ascent would hardly be justifiable, and so delighted were we with it that we named it the "Red Sentinel," or "la Sentinelle Rouge."

We had reached the east ridge of the Tour Ronde at 10 A.M. Many hours of daylight lay before us; the snow on all southerly slopes was good and hard; the weather was perfect. As one man we exclaimed, "We will go on."

The Tour Ronde is no part of a rapid or easy route from the Col du Géant to the upper Brenva Glacier, and from the point on the ridge where we halted on first seeing Mont Blanc, a long broken ridge confronted us, offering the prospect of several hours' climbing. The alternative was a direct horizontal traverse over the southern slopes of the Tour Ronde, which would have the advantage of taking us to the Col Occidental de la Tour Ronde, whence it is possible to descend to the Brenva Glacier. The excellent condition of the snow enabled us to walk with confidence over slopes of fully 50° in angle. The last wavering doubt was dissipated; we were coming to grips with things.

With our crampons biting well into the icy snow at every step, we passed steadily over the face of the Tour Ronde, probably the first party to undertake what would under icy conditions be a most hazardous route, but which was now perfectly safe, and an hour later found ourselves on the Col Occidental de la Tour Ronde, with nothing but steep snow slopes separating us from the Brenva Glacier and the base of our objective.

Soon we reached the snow bay at the head of the Brenva Glacier, and walked across its gentle expanses to the foot of the Col Moore at the commencement of the Brenva ridge.

The col was protected by a half-choked crevasse and a wall of ice, perhaps sixty feet high, artfully overlaid with slushy snow. It was cold work for the leader; at every step the snow had to be shovelled and scraped away in order that a sound foothold could be cut

into the solid substratum of ice. Cutting with one hand whilst clinging to an ice handhold with the other is slow work, but our blood was up; axes swung viciously, and a little later we were straddling the knife-edged parabola of snow forming the summit of the col.

The snow ridge above the Col Moore leading to the lowest rocks of the ordinary Brenva route is remarkably acute, and the interested spectator, had he been present, would have observed two ordinarily rational men take up the burden of the serpent on its unstable crest. To put it more bluntly, we were forced to worm our way, inch by inch, on our bellies.

At 2 P.M. we gained the friendly rocks and sat down to a well-earned meal. We now saw that the direct route to the "Red Sentinel" was impossible, and to reach it we must traverse across the face. This traverse, which lies over ground of unrelenting steepness, involves the passage of no less than four couloirs. Of these, three were constantly swept by falling stones, and one formed the chute for the enormous ice-avalanches that fall from a mass of tottering ice pinnacles, hundreds of feet high, at the edge of a small hanging glacier perched up on the side of the mountain. To attempt a crossing while the hot sun was shining on the face would be suicidal; we must wait for it to pass, and for frost to curb the activities of the stone and avalanche fiends.

We had over two hours to wait, and we set to work to dry our clothes and stockings which had become sodden from our crawl along the snow ridge.

We were now confident and happy. "A very strange feeling of confidence," wrote Graham Brown in his account. I experienced the same feeling. The unknown lower part of the route, which we had feared most, was now known; our early misgivings and fears had vanished. So we lazed a sunny hour away at the foot of the grandest mountain-side in the Alps, sometimes chatting, more often in silent contemplation of our surroundings, whilst the smoke from our pipes stole up the red granite crags in peace-offering to the Mountain King whose inmost sanctuary we were about to invade.

Slowly the sun swung down behind Mont Blanc; cold purple shadows welled up the precipices; the ice of the Brenva Glacier changed in colour to a daffodil yellow.

The previous evening when the sun had set, Mont Blanc had appalled us, but now the shadow armies were our allies and friends.

The sun left us at 3.52 P.M., but we waited for the snow to harden properly.

At 4.50 P.M. we knocked out our pipes, strapped on our heavy rucksacks, and set off for the "Red Sentinel."

The first of the four couloirs was simple—our crampons gave good purchase in the hard frozen snow,—but the second couloir was seared by an ugly ice groove ten feet deep, formed

by the continual action of falling débris. Graham Brown drove in his axe to the head, and slowly paid out the rope, as I cut steps down the vertical side of the groove, then over its bed, and up the other side, keeping a careful look-out meanwhile for falling stones. But the whole mountain-side was now silent as the grave, and we did not see the smallest stone fall.

The third couloir was easy, but the last is the one that may be swept at any moment by thousands of tons of ice-blocks. We raced across its slabby bed at the utmost speed, and flung ourselves panting down beneath the friendly protection of some overhanging rocks.

The "Red Sentinel" was now almost immediately above us, and we quickly climbed the steep slopes of rock, ice, and snow to its foot.

Our Guardian is perhaps two hundred feet high, and projects defiantly from the mountain-side in a smooth buttress of warm red granite. So pronounced is the overhang, that however great the avalanche that may fall from the hanging glaciers above, the débris cannot possibly harm any one at the base of it. In addition to this, the summit of the Sentinel is connected to the mountain-side by a sharp horizontal ridge of snow, and anything that falls from above is divided and sweeps the couloirs on either side.

A large inward-tilted slab lay at the base of it, covered by a cone of snow and ice. Twenty minutes chipping and scraping with our ice-axes sufficed to fashion an alcove in the ice about three feet wide and seven feet long, protected at both ends, which was large enough for our Zdarsky tent-sack. To prevent any possibility of a nightmare roll from our narrow perch to the Brenva Glacier 1500 feet beneath, we drove our ice-axes in above and securely fastened the rope thereto.

We unpacked our rucksacks, made a hot soup over the spirit-cooker, and settled down to await the night. This was not long in coming. As the sun set, we saw the beautiful phenomenon described by Sir Leslie Stephen in his classic essay, 'Sunset from Mont Blanc'—the immense shadow of the Monarch sweeping the ranges and finally mounting the sky. Like Stephen, we were privileged to witness the other sun, whose rays are shafts of darkness, but which are actually the parallel shadows of Mont Blanc, apparently converging on the horizon.

Yet day lingered awhile and, long after the fires were quenched and the pageant passed on its way, a weird ashen glow steeped some stately cloud pillars brooding in the south. We expected to see them lightning lit later, but on this most perfect of late summer nights even the Thunder God slept in his couch of cumuli.

The air was very still. Not a breath of wind whispered around the stern figure of the

Sentinel above. It seems absurd to invest a mere rock with the attributes of sympathy and understanding; but all that night a friendly presence encompassed us, watching over the two little things that were men, who shivered and kicked on that hitherto untrodden mountain-side.

On these occasions amid the sublimity of Nature's inmost sanctuaries, where no human being has stood before, the mind is capable of asserting itself above the discomforts of the body, and the most prosaic of men will find his thoughts wandering in realms of strange fancy. The forces of the World are vast, and sometimes inexorably cruel; they care little for weaklings; but to those who deliberately set themselves to wrest from them their secrets they are often kind.

We estimated our height at 12,300 feet, and the clear starlit night was bitterly cold. No comfort was to be found in our Zdarsky tent-sack. As a means of refined torture these tent-sacks are admirable. They are so designed that the two victims sit inside facing one another, and supporting the fabric with their heads. A few minutes of partial suffocation follow until at length, unable to gasp longer without fresh stimulus, the lower edge is raised, and a gush of cold fresh air forces its way into the carbon-dioxidised interior. Meanwhile, the inside of the tent is saturated with condensed moisture, which drips unpleasantly down the neck. In fairness, however, it must be admitted that one of these tents might be of the greatest service to a party forced to bivouac high up in bad weather.

All night long the growl of avalanches was almost continuous, chiefly from the direction of the Pétéret ridge and the crumbling rocks of the Tour Ronde; but between each growl of wrath there was complete and utter silence.

We were soon to learn the might of the "Red Sentinel." Suddenly there came a crash from above, the increasing roar of thousands of tons of falling ice bearing downwards upon us. Then happened as we had foretold. The mass of the avalanche was divided by the Sentinel, and its two streams poured down the couloirs on either side a few yards away. So secure were we in the knowledge of our complete safety that we could appreciate to the full this unique experience, and our only regret was in not witnessing the spectacle.

For a few moments the masses went thundering past; then the noise subsided to a mutter, and finally died as the ice, ground to fragments in its fall, came to rest on the Brenva Glacier beneath.

One other incident of that eventful night I remember vividly. To induce warmth we brewed several cups of tea, and during one brewing we were startled to hear three long-drawn moans come up from the Brenva Glacier. Each moan was several seconds in duration, and seemed expressive of the

utmost agony. They were inhuman in tone, and yet unlike any mechanical noise or syren that we had ever heard. I can offer no explanation. Glacier ice, under pressure, makes curious noises; it sometimes cracks, grates, and booms in the night, but I have never before heard a noise resembling those three extraordinary moans. The effect was weird in the extreme, and to us it seemed as though the very spirits of the lost or the damned were abroad that night.

Apart from these two excitements, sleep was impossible owing to the intense cold. Graham Brown endured it more philosophically than I, but suffered slight frostbite in his toes as a consequence. I spent most of the night in kicking my feet together, and periodically crawling out of the tent-sack for indulgence in the excellent exercise favoured among cab-drivers.

The night seemed endless and the World given over to perpetual darkness and cold, but at long last grey dawn filtered up from far Tyrol. We welcomed it with tea, ate some chocolate, and painfully strapped on crampons over the boots we had not removed all night. The iron stuck to our fingers with cold.

At 5.30 A.M. we passed out from beneath the "Red Sentinel" into the couloir on the west of it. With memories of the ice-avalanche that had swept it in the night, we climbed up and across this at the greatest possible speed, and soon gained the rock ridge on the edge of the main couloir. There can be no finer couloir in the Alps than this 5000 feet chute. In the middle runs an enormous groove of ice 20 feet wide and 12 feet deep, writhing down like some evil serpent, and polished black by the passage of ice-avalanches and falling stones.

We descended into the couloir, and keeping close under the ridge, commenced the ascent. No falling material could touch us, for a friendly rock promontory projected ahead, and the hard snow at the side over which we mounted was smooth and unscored.

Our safety and the success of the expedition depended upon our crossing the branch couloir to the bending rock ridge before the sun obtained sufficient power to unleash the avalanches from the grip of the frost; and already the first glow of dawn was lighting the crest of Mont Blanc.

Gone now was the stiffness in our limbs engendered by our overnight chilling; the sweat poured from us as we laboured up the snow. To have met with hard ice here must have been fatal—the angle of the couloir is about 55°. But the good firm snow we had anticipated covered the ice, and our crampons ground well home into its frozen surface at every step.

Up and up we panted, until we were level with the lowest rocks of the bending ridge which splits the main couloir

into two branches. Without a pause we rushed across the right-hand branch couloir towards them, finding with thankfulness that a deep avalanche channel in the centre could be crossed without difficulty.

At length we were on the bending ridge in perfect safety. Everything had worked out exactly to plan, and not a pebble had fallen.

Our previous examination through the telescope had shown that, once having attained the crest of the bending ridge, we were safe from avalanches for the remainder of the climb. We sat down on a slab of rock. Our exertions had been severe; for a few minutes we allowed mind and muscle to relax in infinite repose. Security is only worth while if one must fight and scheme to win it; it is moments like these that justify the motto, "Live dangerously."

We untied our rucksacks and ate the good things that we had been too numbed and stiff to assimilate beneath the "Red Sentinel."

The morning was brilliantly clear, save for a few vagabond cloudlets floating about the distant Grivola; 10,000 feet beneath the meadows of Courmayeur drowsed in the morning shadow. An hour passed like an idle thought, and we turned once more to the ascent. As we did so we observed the first stones, loosened by the hot sun, whizzing down the couloirs on either side of the ridge. Our margin of safety had proved substantial, and we were well content.

We thought that above the climbing would become progressively easier, but here the telescope had entirely misled us, and we found the exact opposite to be actually the case. "There was in fact," wrote Graham Brown, "only one short portion on which we were not moving one at a time. Such is the reality that perspective may clothe with fantasy on high mountains."

The rock was unexpectedly sound, a grey red granite affording delightful climbing; it was a joy to grip its clean-cut holds and crawl up the friendly sun-warmed slabs.

A wall of rock perhaps 150 feet high cuts across the ridge, separating the lower portion from the upper. We avoided it on the right, and gained the crest of the ridge above over very steep ice. An edge of snow followed, moulded by the wind to a thin blade of fairy-like beauty. It seemed a sacrilege to flog it down with the axe and to leave it mutilated by our clumsy passage.

Once again we were forced off the ridge by its difficulty on to an exposed ice traverse under some rocks—ice so steep that we were forced to cut handholds as well as footholds. I have in mind an awkward corner, round which it was necessary to swing by gripping a leaf of rock with the hands into a little gully of pure ice. We regained the ridge, and continued along it over easier rocks to the point where it

becomes horizontal and abuts against the mountain-side. Here we noted with some anxiety that a 100 feet high rock face separated us from the upper ice slopes leading up to the final ice wall.

It was 10.30 A.M., and we sat down to another meal. Some way below on a ledge lay a piece of wood, and we speculated with interest as to how it could have come there. In shape it was similar to an aeroplane strut, but Graham Brown's suggestion that it was a piece of the old Jansen observatory come down through the ice-cap of Mont Blanc was probably the correct one.

The view was now superb. The ice ridge of the Brenva had sunk below us; the torn Brenva Glacier resembled the wrinkled countenance of an old man. We scanned the steeps for a view of the "Red Sentinel," but it was now fully 1500 feet below and out of sight. A violet haze filled the Italian valleys, over which the distant snow peaks of Cogne rose like fairy castles from a sea of dreams. Far above, in grim reality, loomed the final ice wall.

After building a cairn and leaving our names in a jam tin, we set off again at 11.45. Without trouble we passed along the horizontal crest of the ridge to the foot of the 100 feet rock face. There, to our relief, we found that a beneficent Nature had placed a feasible chimney at precisely the spot where it was essential. Up to this point everything had gone marvellously well. Not once had we had to retrace our steps, no insuperable obstacle had presented itself, the curious unreasoning instinct that every mountaineer knows had proved infallible.

We were climbing on a rope-length of 100 feet, and at the top of the chimney I sat down on a ledge and proceeded to take in the rope as Graham Brown ascended. As I sat I allowed my gaze to wander over the expanses our height commanded until, out of the corner of my eye, I perceived a figure coming over the edge of the cliff at the top of the chimney. Graham Brown had evidently made short work of the chimney, and I turned to remark on the fact, but saw to my amazement that there was no one there. At the same time I heard Graham Brown's voice some distance below, and saw the piece of ribbon tied round the rope marking its mid-point just appearing out of the chimney. Hallucinations are not uncommon when body and brain are working at their utmost capacity, and the mental stress of a great climb is a very real factor, as apart from the purely physical. On this account the incident produced but little impression on me at the time, and was submerged beneath more practical considerations. I might even have forgotten it, had it not been for a remark of Graham Brown's when we were afterwards discussing the climb. He said—

"You know, Smythe, throughout the climb I always had the most curious feeling that there was a third man on the rope, and I couldn't rid myself of it all the way up. I think the feeling was strongest of all during the night beneath the 'Red Sentinel.'"

Above the rock wall we found ourselves on very steep ice slopes, covered by a thin layer of slushy snow. And it was ice of exceptional hardness. The axe sank in with a dull thud, often without bringing away a chip. Many strokes were required to fashion a step, and every step represented a definite piece of hard work. The ice near the top of the Brenva route is of much the same consistency, and Dr Claude Wilson described it in the 'Alpine Journal' as "Steep slippery ice, of a hardness unknown to us before, and with a curious quality unique in our experience, born probably of great cold and enormous pressure—a quality of viscosity which gave the impression of cutting into something which would not chip, but whose particles clung together like stiff tar . . . almost as hard as marble and tough as rubber."

Some scattered rocks projecting through the ice were to the right of us, and we cut across towards them. We moved with the greatest care, yet had one of us slipped the rope would have served but to pull the other man from his steps. Personally the thought of a slip on the part of Graham Brown never entered my head, and I like to think that he felt the same. Mutual confidence in such a situation is the finest asset a climbing party can possess, and to my mind this confidence is one of the factors elevating mountaineering above the physical plane. There is nothing that promotes a greater understanding and friendship than a danger equally shared.

We gained the rocks and climbed them for a few feet, until we were forced once more on to the ice slope. Scattered about were other rocks, and we linked these as best we could by ascending traverses to right and left.

Against our will, we were gradually forced to the right, beneath the impending ice wall, where it sweeps round a shoulder in the direction of Mont Blanc. Danger, however, there was none, for this portion of the wall was solidly built. Finally we turned left again, and clambered up to the highest rocks. We were now approaching the crux of the climb. Had the telescope spoken the truth, or was the fortress unassailable?

From our position we looked right along the mighty natural fortification. A veil of ice-javelins hung from the upper edge glittering in the sun, and beneath the wall was sheared away as though cut by a knife of a skilled workman. We looked to the left and at once saw that the wall gradually decreased in height, and finally petered out altogether for a

short distance in the ice slope we had seen through the telescope. Once above it and we should be within the inmost keep of the Monarch.

We pressed on to the attack. On our left an ill-defined rib of ice, rounded and exceedingly steep, ran up the ice slope at the point where the ice wall is breached. To reach it involved a traverse across very steep ice. With hope in our hearts, our axes swung hard to their task, the fragments of ice went skipping into the depths beneath, and we were soon across.

We found the rib to consist of the usual glutinous ice. Up and up it swept at a pitiless angle, and many hours of continuous hacking seemed in prospect. But at all events, uncertainty as to the route was now at an end.

Once again fortune—the incredible fortune that had never forsaken us through all those strenuous hours—smiled. To the right of the ice rib, and sheltered from the sun, two or three inches of hard snow clung to the ice sufficiently frozen to hold our crampons. Step-cutting was unnecessary and we could walk up, albeit carefully, and with the picks of our axes firmly implanted at every step.

We climbed rapidly and passed between some bulges that evidently formed the remains of the ice wall. Up and up we pressed, excitement growing at each foot gained. A small cornice curled over above, sun-kissed against the blue of Heaven. We halted a moment for breath, then fell upon it furiously and flogged it down. At 3.30 P.M. we crawled over and grasped hands. Nothing remained save a few hundred feet of easy snow to the summit of Mont Blanc.

Up went our arms and axes, and roars of joy were flung over the edge into Italy. For many hours we had been chained to the wall of the citadel; now that wall, terribly forbidding in the afternoon shadow, lay well below.

Unless I can carry the reader with me to that final cornice of Mont Blanc, how can I hope to convey an impression of those unforgettable moments? All I remember now was a vast shadowed gulf from the maw of which we had stepped into the sun; the snow breast of Mont Blanc above, curving deliberately into a sky of deepest blue; an insignificant evening breeze that murmured a welcome; silver foreground and blue distance shot tenderly with gold.

At 4.15 P.M. we stood on the summit of MONT BLANC.

The last party had gone, and on top at that late hour we were alone. A catalogue of peaks was ours to identify; 200 miles of distance ours to roam over; but we dreamt, and for a while trod space with the Gods.

Sunlit cloud genii stood out of the valleys; the haze over Italy had deepened to purple; we turned and tramped down

the ordinary way to the Vallot hut.

We had the hut to ourselves and slept well, despite the filth which defiles its shelter, until we were awakened in the morning by a tourist with a thermometer hung round his neck, and three guides bound for Mont Blanc.

We descended, not by the usual way, but by the Tête Rousse route, and in the evening arrived back at the Montenvers Hotel.

The proprietor and Josef Knubel—a well-known guide—joined us over the inevitable champagne. We were very happy. Before passing into sleep that night we both realised that rain was falling in torrents, and a furious storm raging on Mont Blanc.

NOTE BY PROFESSOR GRAHAM BROWN.

Mr Smythe has very kindly allowed me the privilege of adding a short note to his account of our joint first ascent of the "Sentinel route" on Mont Blanc, in particular reference to my curious feeling that there was a "third man" in the party. Mr Smythe's story is perfectly correct, but I am glad of the opportunity to prevent any misconstruction of my experience in terms of the "supernatural."

With regard to the experience itself. During the sleepless night which we spent at the Red Sentinel, I was in a half drowsy state—due, no doubt, to the fatigue which followed the day's work. In that state the mind sometimes wanders rather chaotically amongst the incidents of the preceding day; and on this occasion I found myself constantly wondering who had done various things, in particular the little things we had done at the bivouac place itself. Who had put the crampons where we had set them for safety? Who had done this or that? In many cases I could not remember having done the thing myself, and could not remember Smythe having done it. I constantly felt that it must have been somebody else, and then, when I realised that there was nobody else with us, my thoughts went off elsewhere, leaving me with a vague feeling of annoyance.

During the upper part of our climb next day, particularly on the fierce upper ice slopes, I was in that curiously detached mental state which many climbers experience at high altitudes. Again and again the mind reverted in a rather vague way to the past incidents of the climb, and again and again this curious feeling of impersonality towards some of these incidents recurred. It seemed to me that this incident or that was due neither to Smythe nor myself. I felt that it was due to another member of our party, and I was very much annoyed with myself for forgetting who he was. I could give him neither name nor

appearance, and then in a flash I knew that we two were alone. Each time this happened the knowledge that there was no other member of the party soon satisfied me that the explanation lay merely in the fact that I had forgotten myself doing, or that I had not seen Smythe do, the thing in question—spreading the contents of a rucksack at one of our halts, or what not. The feeling then went, but soon afterwards recurred in reference to some other incident. I never had, however, any feeling of giving a definite personality to the "third man."

The explanation of this is, I think, a simple and rational one. In my climbing experience I have not been more than seven or eight times on a high mountain with a single companion, and the more usual feeling of being one of a larger party has been established in me. This might well explain the experience. Even when one is fit, the mind is not quite normal at high altitudes after long bodily fatigue. In extreme fatigue actual hallucinations are by no means unusual, and in my own case I have on previous occasions once or twice experienced this in a very mild form: in each instance after facing a steep snow or ice slope for a considerable time I have seen a clump of blue gentians upon it in a momentary flash. In a more extreme state it is by no means unlikely that the mind might be influenced by the more usual habit of climbing in a larger party than two. But I think that another factor may also have played a part. When Smythe and I examined the route carefully from the Col du Géant, we were both very nearly overawed. For my part I felt that I must not let *him* down, and he told me subsequently that he had the same feeling towards *me*. I had to screw myself up, and I did this by inventing to myself (as a lesser man of science) a sort of obligation to avenge the death of Professor Maitland Balfour on the south side of Mont Blanc by making a new ascent on that side of the mountain. This rather childish fantasy may possibly have played some part in my subsequent experience, but I have no recollection of it playing any conscious part.

After the ascent, and when we lay in the Vallot Refuge before descending, I told Smythe of the curious feeling of confidence I had immediately we went "over the top" on to the untrodden Brenva face of Mont Blanc. That feeling was a perfectly natural one, because at this point we could *see* that the hitherto unknown part of our route would go safely. I also told him of this other curious experience, when, as he has written, he told me at once of his own. All these experiences are capable of perfectly natural explanation; but, in combination with our experience of the physical security of the Red Sentinel, they tend to weave themselves into a pretty story.

THE GOLDEN MOUSE.

BY A. G. C.

LAST April I travelled from Rome to Paris by the *train de luxe*. A plutocratic uncle had just died, and, as his nearest surviving relative, I hoped that I could afford to do myself well. We must have been somewhere near Genoa when I limped in to dinner, and found that my reserved seat was at a table for four, the other three places being already occupied by a man and two ladies. I was placed next to the younger of the ladies, and opposite to the man. It was soon apparent that my companions were Americans—husband, wife, and daughter. The wife it was who picked me up over a matter of the salt or some such triviality. When they learned that I was going to London, the man, who seemed a kindly but harassed individual, asked me whether I could recommend a good hotel, as they, too, were going on to London after the womenfolk, as he termed them, had augmented his cares by adding a new stock of dresses to their already overflowing wardrobes. I gave him the names of several hotels, and he asked me to write them down, producing as he spoke a silver pencil-case from his waistcoat pocket. I took the pencil and sat there dumfounded, for it was my own pencil, with my initials on it, which I had lost while watching the skiing at Montreux two years before. His daughter had picked it up a month ago, the man explained, and the young lady corroborated this, saying that she had been at school in Switzerland, and had just joined her parents in Rome.

Now if any one doubts this story, I can refer him to Mr and Mrs Homer T. Wardwell of Grosse Pointe, Detroit, Michigan, and to Miss Lois Wardwell of the same address. This coincidence, at once so remarkable and so respectably vouched for, gives me courage to hope that my veracity will not be called in question if I set down the incidents leading up to the disappearance of Henry Judson and the finding of the Golden Mouse.

I. THE SKELETON WITH THE GOLD TOOTH.

Fifteen years ago the plain which lies between the upper reaches of the Nile and the Abyssinian plateau was not nearly so well known as it is to-day. The map supplied to me when I started from headquarters to establish a fortified

post on the Bonga River left a good deal to the imagination, and my chief's description of the country as a swamp inhabited by one naked, ash-smeared, half-human unmentionable to the square mile, was not unwarranted. But the inhabitants, though primitive, seemed to have a certain value as slaves in the eyes of the more lawless of our Abyssinian neighbours, and it was with the object of preventing this traffic that my post was planted on the Bonga.

I arrived with my company about six weeks before the rains broke, and for the next seven or eight months we were so busy building houses and digging ourselves in that we had no time for exploration. By the time the rains were over and the ground sufficiently dry for marching, we had everything snug, and I was able to devote a little of my leisure to shooting, the district being a notable one for game of all sorts.

And then one morning, just before sunrise, my servant brought in my early tea and told me that a man from the village twenty miles to the west of us had arrived with intelligence that a slaving party had carried off ten women and children, burnt the huts, and killed several of the warriors who had put up a fight.

I sent at once for the orderly officer, and, after telling him to have the alarm sounded, dressed as quickly as I could. I thought, of course, that the raiders would be coming upstream past the fort, and that we might expect them at any moment, but when I got out and interviewed the messenger myself, I found that the marauders were taking a southern route back to the mountains. The man said that they had come by this, and would, he was certain, return the same way. I got out my map and consulted it, for I had not hitherto been aware that there was any direct road to the mountains south of the stream commanded by my post. I say road, but, of course, there really were no roads, such routes as existed being merely tracks, conditioned by available supplies of water. And water was the main difficulty. In the rainy season there is too much, the whole country being little better than a swamp, with the streams, great muddy torrents, swirling along level with their banks. In the dry weather there is too little, and the land dries up to a hard cake of mud, cracked and fissured over its uneven surface. The shrunken rivers become mere trickles, or, yielding to the power of the sun, give up the struggle and lie in widely separated pools.

Such a succession of pools I now found indicated on my map by a dotted line running roughly parallel to the Bonga, some thirty miles to the south. The line was marked as "*Doubtful—Native Sources*," indicating that the officer who had supplied the information for this

sheet of the map had not visited the place himself. I questioned the messenger carefully as to the strength of the raiding party, and came to the conclusion that I should be safe in taking them on with half my company. The only problem was how to come up with them. If I started at once for the village and followed on their tracks, I should never do it, for they would have a start of many hours; but if I could cut across country from the fort and strike their line of retreat along the problematical chain of pools, I might still intercept them, for their pace would necessarily be slow, hampered as they were by the captured women and children.

The only question was: could we do the thirty-mile march on the men's water-bottles? I thought we could, by marching at night. My adjutant thought it would be very risky, in view of the uncertainty of the distance and the doubtful nature of the water supply on arrival. "Supposing, sir," he said, "you were to strike the chain of pools between two of them, and had to march another five or six miles to get water?"

Of course, he was quite right; the risk was considerable, but I hated to think of letting the raiders go past within thirty miles while I sat and did nothing. At this point the messenger, who had been listening to our conversation, chipped in with a yarn about a pool of water under a big stone half-way across. He had seen the place once, he said, when he and a party were following a wounded elephant. He was sure he could find it if I would take him as a guide. The water was bad, as many animals drank from it and fouled it; but it was fit to drink, for he had drunk from it himself and was none the worse. That decided me. The man looked honest, and, though I didn't put too much faith in his pool of water, knowing how such local supplies vary from year to year, still the possibility of refilling our water-bottles half-way gave just the needed additional weight to tip the scales in favour of action.

We started in the early afternoon, fifty rifles, two native officers, and myself. We had four mules in the fort, and I took two of them, one to carry a small amount of reserve ammunition and rations, the other carrying water and a few odds and ends. I know now that I was wrong to carry anything but water, but it is easy to be wise after the event. The guide marched at the head of the column with me, and carried my sporting rifle.

The pace was good at first, though the going was very rough, some of the cracks in the caked soil being nearly wide enough to catch the heels of our boots. As soon as we cleared the belt of thorny scrub which fringed the course of our stream we struck right out into the barren plain.

Nothing broke the dead monotony except such clumps of long yellow grass as had escaped the succession of fires which sweep the land in early spring. Now and then a herd of hartebeeste, making for the river and their evening drink, would cross our path, apparently untroubled by our presence. Giraffe, ostriches, white-eared kob, and roan, all these we saw and suffered to escape unmolested, so plentiful were they in this deserted land and so urgent our purpose.

At six o'clock we halted to rest and eat, resuming our march at seven to take advantage of the waning moon. Steadily we tramped on, keeping a direction a little east of south by my compass. Towards ten o'clock the men began to stumble as they walked, and I was about to give, unwillingly, the order to halt, when the mule carrying the water put her foot in a crack and came down upon her nose. We lost a few quarts of priceless fluid before we could, in the darkness and confusion, find and replace the bung which had been jerked out of the tank. This would never do, and, though there was still an hour of moonlight, I decided to stop and make up the distance in the morning. We must, I thought, be very near the promised water-hole at which our supply might be replenished, but, for safety's sake, I ordered each man, as soon as he had had a drink, to store his water-bottle beside the place where I lay down, close to the sentry posted over the ammunition and supplies. I noticed with regret, though without surprise, that many of the bottles were empty. My own, I am glad to say, was nearly full, though I had suffered considerably from thirst during the early stages of the march. Self-restraint is a virtue of civilisation, and, though I had seen many of these same men endure without complaint the stern privations of the Fast of Ramadan, they were then, I knew, upheld by a religious fervour which now was lacking.

My rest was troubled. I was too tired to sleep. My sense of responsibility was a torture. What about this guide? Did I know anything about him? Had he, perhaps, enticed me from the fort with half my troops, so that the raiders could pass up the river in safety? Perhaps, even, they might attack the post in our absence. Had he drawn us out on to the plain to die of thirst? In a fever of restlessness I sat up. "Where is the guide?" I called out softly to the sentry. "He is here, sir," answered the soldier calmly, indicating a bundle near his feet. He spoke in the quiet voice of one who soothes a fretful child. I suppose he thought I had been dreaming. Perhaps I had. At any rate, I felt ashamed of my fears, and, taking a firm hold of myself, I lay down again and was soon asleep.

Before dawn we breakfasted, and as soon as it was light enough to see resumed our march. By sunrise I calculated that we had come nearly twenty miles, and feared we must have missed the half-way pool of water during the hours of darkness. The guide insisted, however, that it was still in front, and urged us to press on. The conservative pace of marching troops was plainly irksome to him, and he cast anxious eyes behind as the coolness of the morning hours gave place to the blinding glare of the forenoon. My suspicions of the night returned as the morning wore on. Men began to straggle and to beg for water. Placing the guide in charge of one of my officers, I dropped back to the rear of the column. The question would soon have to be faced whether it was safe to go on or if it would be better to turn back while we still had enough water left for the return journey. Desperately I pushed the alternative from my mind. If I was beginning to think like that, what must be in the minds of the others? Thoughts are contagious—I would have to fix my own firmly on the interception of the raiders and on nothing else. Quickening my pace I pushed on again up to the leading files. "Well," I called out to the guide, "are we near the rock yet?"

"Ahuh!" he answered, and pointed to his front. Following the direction of his finger with my eyes I saw through the dancing heat haze an object of some sort breaking the line of the horizon. It might have been a thorn-tree or an ant-hill, but the guide was insistent. "That's it," he repeated. "That's the rock—half-way."

There was no need to communicate the good news to the men. I heard a satisfied murmur passing down the line, "Half-way—thanks be to Allah!" The pace quickened sensibly, the stragglers closed up, the line began to crowd in on me from behind. "Gently, gently," I called back to them. "There's no hurry; it is still some distance." Good-humoured laughter and jests passed from front to rear as they fell again into their places—reassuring sounds to a leader of native troops.

For the next half-hour the rock seemed to get no nearer, and then all at once it was quite close. I suppose the thing was in a slight depression in the ground, and we had been gradually rising to the edge. Country which looks flat is seldom absolutely level. The rock proved to be a great chunk of sandstone, sticking up like a tooth about ten feet from the plain. I don't know how it got there, for there were no other rocks within twenty miles, but there it stood, and by its side a solitary thorn-tree spread its forbidding branches level with the top. But there was no water! Only a little damp mud in the centre of a wide depression at the base of the

stone showed the hoof-marks of the animals which had used the precious store as long as it had lasted.

My first thought was fury at the guide, but that passed as I looked at him and saw him tremble as he stood. The men had fallen out without word of command, and were standing in groups talking. It was clear that the situation must be faced at once. I called up my senior native officer. "Fall in," I ordered; "I am going to serve out water."

The men fell in, but listlessly, and some of the eyes that met mine were sullen. I made them a short speech. Told them that they were half-way; that the worst of the march was over, and that we should be at water before dark; that we had plenty with us to carry us through if they would act like men, and that I was going to give each man a drink now and fill their water-bottles before we started, which we were going to do in half an hour. I then served out a mouthful to each man, including the guide, and dismissed them, telling them to take off their equipment and rest. That done, I sat down with my back against the rock and lit a pipe.

It was a bad business, but it might have been worse. It was plain that the guide knew what he was talking about, for he had found the rock, even though it had been much farther than we expected. It was not his fault that there was no water. Now if we really were half-way we could do the rest all right, for we could drink all our water, dump the reserve ammunition, and carry some of the rifles on the mules. I was sorry for the mules, they were terribly thirsty, but I was quite prepared to sacrifice them if necessary. Presently I got up and strolled round the rock. Its sides were smooth, and there was no foothold. And then, perversely, I felt that I wanted to get to the top. I walked round again. Some of the men had hung their equipment on the thorn-tree, and had started to dig in the moist ground with their bayonets, in the hope, I suppose, of finding water. Suddenly it occurred to me that I might get on to the rock by way of the thorn-tree. One branch looked strong enough to bear my weight. The thorns were uninviting, but my skin was tough. It was a most accursed climb, but I did it somehow, and sprang from the branch on to the top of the stone.

It was flat on top, slightly hollowed in fact, and split from side to side by a wide crack, and lying across the crack was a human skeleton. The sight gave me a shock. It was so unexpected. White and clean the bones lay in the glare of the sun, the sockets of the eyes and the grinning teeth turned towards me. For a moment I stood there rigid, and then dropped on one knee beside the head, for a yellow flash among the teeth had caught my eye. Everything else

was forgotten as I knelt there over the empty shell—the raiders, the water, even my men—for one of the back teeth of the lower jaw was capped with gold!

Hardly had I realised the significance of my discovery when angry voices and the sound of a blow came up to me from the ground. On the instant speculation as to the skeleton was driven from my mind, banished by the need for action. I sprang to the edge of the rock, and, abandoning the thorn-tree, slid to the ground and landed among the group of diggers, who had ceased work and seemed to be on the point of turning their bayonets on each other. My officers had already separated the principals, but it was plain that tempers were wearing thin under the strain, and that it was time to go. I gave the order to fall in and march.

There is no need to dwell upon the rest of that dreadful afternoon. I had no time to think; my whole attention was concentrated on keeping my men together and on the move. I have since made the distance to be about fifteen miles; nothing very much over a good road and on a cool day, but a cruel march under the conditions in which we were placed. Sunset found us still upon the trackless plain, though a distant line of bushes was said by the guide to mark the course of the chain of pools. Some of the men were quite exhausted and unable to move, and much as I disliked dividing my little force, I realised that something must be done. Accordingly I selected twenty-five of the freshest men, and taking all the water-bottles, slung on the two mules, we pushed on, accompanied by the guide. I didn't want to take the mules, but the poor little beasts were exhausted, and I knew that they must drink or die. The rest of the party, under my senior native officer, I ordered to follow as best they could, but to keep together at all costs. And so, in silence, we marched for an hour. I had given up all thought of the raiders, my only concern being to reach water, when suddenly a spark of light appeared far off to the right. It leaped up and disappeared, and then shone bright again. "Look, your Excellence, a fire," whispered the guide, who was at my elbow, tied with a piece of rope to one of the men. "It is the enemy, thanks be to Allah!"

It is almost impossible to walk quietly on that rough mud, but we tried our best. It was no good taking off our boots, for one is helpless, barefoot, in the dark. I had the mules held back when we got near, but it was the mules that gave us away in the end. The wretched beasts smelt the water, and mad with thirst as they were, they broke from the men holding them, and charged at a wild gallop towards the pool. The water-bottles, banging and clanking against

the saddles, must have given them the effect of cavalry, for the raiders didn't wait. I was afraid to fire for fear of killing the captives, but when I saw that all hope of surprise was at an end, and heard the scattered shots fired by the raiders at the unfortunate mules, I gave my bugler orders to sound the charge, and despite his parched lips he managed to raise a pretty good imitation. Then with a shout we all rushed on the pool.

Well, it's no good making a long story of it; we got back all the captives except one boy, who had died of exhaustion; but the marauders escaped. One of our mules was shot in the leg, and had to be destroyed, and the rest of the party came in before midnight, not very much the worse. But I wouldn't face that plain on the return journey! No, we went back by easy stages along the chain of pools until we were within ten miles of the Bonga, and then we struck across the open.

We were back at the post in less than a week, and there I found Carstairs waiting for me with orders for my immediate departure on leave. I had not expected to be relieved so soon, but I was quite ready to go, though rather disappointed that I should have to postpone a second visit to the rock. Once the excitement of the desert march was over I had speculated much on the mystery of the skeleton with the gold-crowned tooth. That the remains were those of a white man I took for granted, and I formulated theory after theory to account for his presence in that deserted spot. That he had come from Abyssinia I was certain, for no one had disappeared from our side of the border in recent years. Had he been a hunter, a prospector, or a trader? To these questions there could be no answer without further investigation, and now my chance of visiting the place again had to be postponed, if not definitely abandoned. I told the story to Carstairs, and he was very much interested, but doubted whether he would be able to get away from the fort before the rains began. I asked him not to say anything about it to the native officers—I had not mentioned it to them myself—and he promised not to, the understanding being that if he was not able to visit the rock himself he would hand on the story to the next British officer who came up—that is, of course, if I did not myself get a chance to rejoin my old company after my leave. And on that agreement we parted.

II. THE ARK OF THE COVENANT.

When I joined the mail boat at Taufikia I found Hawkwood on board, going on leave from the Mountain Province, and it was Hawkwood who induced me to break my journey in

Italy and accompany him to Florence, and it was in Florence that I met again my friend Colonel Ricardo of the Italian General Staff and heard the story of Henry Judson and the Ark of the Covenant. It just shows how strangely chance works; for if it had not been for young Hawkwood I should never have stopped in Italy at all, but should have gone straight through from Brindisi to London, as I had at first intended. However, it is futile trying to trace things back to their first cause.

Before I started on leave I had, of course, submitted a written report about my attempt to cut off the raiding party, and had described the finding of the skeleton, but the people at headquarters were not as interested as I had expected, and, though they promised to make inquiries, they seemed to be much more concerned about the loss of one of my mules than about the finding of the skeleton.

My usual custom when going on leave was to get to England by the quickest possible route, but I found Hawkwood such good company that he had little difficulty in persuading me to stop with him in Italy. His reason for wanting to go to Florence appealed to me. He was reading for the Staff College, and in one of his text-books he had come across an account of a Sir John Hawkwood who appeared to have been a stout fighting man in Italy during the Renaissance. "The greatest soldier of fortune up to the time of Marlborough," the book said. This gentleman was buried in Florence, and Hawkwood, though he did not claim relationship, was anxious to make a pilgrimage to the tomb of one who was, at any rate, a credit to the name.

We disembarked at Brindisi, stopped at Naples and saw Pompeii, spent a day in Rome, where we visited the zoo, and in due course arrived in Florence. After locating the tomb in the cathedral and doing homage to the departed Hawkwood, we went to a race meeting; and it was at the race meeting that I met Ricardo. We had been at school together at Chesterton, and rather good friends. I had vaguely known that he was an Italian though we never thought of him as a foreigner, for his mother was Scotch, and used to visit him sometimes during the term. I had heard that he was in the Italian army, but had not seen him, except for a moment at an old boys' match twenty years before. I recognised him at once. His long, thin, handsome face was just the same, except for a few wrinkles at the corners of the eyes, and he had kept his waist-line better than I had, for all my years of service in Africa.

He remembered me as soon as I spoke to him, and we chatted for a few minutes while his horse was being saddled, for he was riding in the officers' steeplechase, which was next on the card. He prom-

ised to look us up as soon as the race was over, and gave us the tip to back his mount, which, he said, was easily the best thing running. We followed his advice, and presently had the satisfaction of seeing him romp home a comfortable winner. When the races were over Ricardo took us back in the Cavalry Brigade drag, a very smart turn-out driven by one of the subalterns. He dropped us at our hotel, promising to dine with us that night, and I could see that our stock had gone up considerably among the tourists as we said good-bye and made our way through the lobby.

It was after dinner that Ricardo told us the story about the Ark of the Covenant. During the meal we had been recalling old acquaintances and generally bridging the years that had passed since our school days, and it wasn't until we had lighted our cigars that we began to talk about Abyssinia. Ricardo had served for five or six years in the Italian colony of Eritrea, and when I told him that I had just come from the border of Abyssinia he was very much interested. He had shot elephants in my part of the world, he said, and with that the talk turned to shooting in general and to elephants in particular. We were, as is the custom of all who are interested in elephants, arguing as to the relative merits of the heart and head shots, when Ricardo said, "Excuse me one moment," and, getting up, shook hands with an elderly gentleman of pronouncedly Hebraic aspect who had stopped doubtfully near our table.

They talked together earnestly for a few minutes, and then Ricardo rejoined us. "I must apologise for running away like that," he said, "but I saw that he wanted to speak to me. Do you know who he is?"

"No," I answered, "but he looks like a 'sheeny.'"

"Yes, he is, but a very good one," said Ricardo. "I hope you won't mind, but I have promised to take you round to his suite and introduce you; he is staying in this hotel."

"The deuce you have," said I doubtfully, for I have no great love of the chosen people.

"Wait a minute," apologised Ricardo. "Let me explain. He is Jacob Abelsburg, the great American banker, fabulously rich, and a world power—of course, you must know his name."

"I do," put in Hawkwood.

"Well," continued Ricardo, "Abelsburg is a fine old fellow, an orthodox Jew, very strict, and not at all like the flashy diamond-encrusted specimens one sees so often. I met him first, last year, in Rome. He is a great art collector, and he came to look over the picture gallery in my uncle's villa. There is a famous picture there, by an unknown master, of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba; and while he was looking at it, it occurred to me that he might be inter-

ested in the yarn which I am going to tell you—if you can stand it."

"Yes, go ahead; interesting woman, the Queen of Sheba," said Hawkwood.

"When I was out in Eritrea," began Ricardo, "there was a strange old fellow who was in charge of my mobilisation equipment. He was an Italian, but much more like a native than a European. He was one of those unfortunates who were captured at Adowa, but, instead of being mutilated and released as so many of them were, he was kept a captive for years by one of the feudal lords in the Gojam district. I liked the old boy, and he used to come to my quarters and tell me tales of his captivity. One of his yarns was that the Queen of Sheba, who was, as of course you know, Queen of Abyssinia, stole the Ark of the Covenant from Solomon, and brought it back with her and hid it on an island in Lake Tsana."

"But," I objected, "the Israelites surely had the Ark long after Solomon's time."

"Had they?" returned Ricardo; "I don't remember. But anyhow the old storeman's account said the Queen of Sheba had an exact replica made, and that she placed that in the Temple when she stole the real one. Well, I told this story to old Abelsburg, and he was very interested. 'Is this generally known in Abyssinia?' he asked. I said that I didn't think so, that it was only a fairy story, and that the old man who told me only repeated it as an amusing fable. But he persisted. 'Is this old man still in Eritrea?' he asked. 'No, he's dead,' I said. 'He died while I was out there.' He was greatly disappointed at that. 'Did he tell you where he heard the story?' he went on. I told him that I couldn't remember, but that it was really of no importance.

"'Colonel Ricardo,' he said, in a dignified way which made me feel ashamed, 'the fortunes of my race have declined ever since the days of King Solomon; I am wondering whether your story may not have revealed the cause.'"

"By Jove, that's an idea!" ejaculated young Hawkwood.

"Just now," continued Ricardo, "when I went over to talk to him, he asked me if I was still in touch with affairs in Eritrea, for he was anxious to obtain news, unofficially, about a young friend of his who had gone out there about a year ago on his way to Abyssinia. I said that most of the people I had known in the colony were now elsewhere, but I mentioned you two fellows as having just come from that part of the world, and suggested that he might like to meet you. When I told him that you were British officers, he said that if you would do him the honour of coming to his suite after we have finished our coffee he would like to ask you a few questions." Ricardo stopped and looked at us questioningly.

"As he has put it so politely," I said, "I don't see how we can very well refuse."

"I'm for it," said Hawkwood. "We might be able to touch him for a bit."

We found Mr Abelsburg waiting for us in the sitting-room of his suite, and I had the grace to feel ashamed of having referred to him as a "sheeny." The unostentatious perfection of his manners made me conscious of my own, and, in spite of his appearance, the moment he spoke one forgot the Jew and perceived only the man. He gave one the impression of honesty and absolute simplicity. It was foreign to all my preconceived ideas that honesty and simplicity should be the outstanding characteristics of a world-renowned financier, and an American Jew at that, but perhaps these very qualities were the secret of his success. At any rate, as soon as we were seated and provided with refreshments, he began without delay to explain the reason for his interest in us.

"I think, gentlemen," he began, "that I had better take you completely into my confidence, for the information which I am seeking concerns a young Englishman who is obviously of your own class, and as I am going to ask you to treat what I say as confidential, I do not wish to conceal anything. Two years ago my only daughter was introduced to a young Englishman named Henry Judson, who was, at that time, employed in some minor capacity in your embassy at Washington. He came to my house on several occasions, and I found him pleasant company, but in no way remarkable. We had not, as you may imagine, much in common, and I confess that he had scarcely registered on my consciousness when one morning he called on me with a view to obtaining my consent to his marriage with my daughter. I need not enter into my reasons for refusing to countenance this engagement; I gave them clearly to Mr Judson, and they were entirely adequate. He left Washington shortly afterwards, and I did not see him again for nearly twelve months. My daughter, gentlemen, is my only child. Since the death of her mother we have been much together. After Mr Judson left Washington she seemed to lose interest in things. She had said very little when I spoke to her of my interview with Judson, and for a time I was blind to the cause of her failing health. But she is very dear to me, and presently I guessed. I decided that change of air and scene would be most likely to restore her balance, so we went to Europe. The cure was worse than the disease, for we met Henry Judson in Rome. He came to see me again, and again I refused to consider his proposal. My daughter pleaded with me. I was obdurate, but in my heart was the fear of losing her. And then I met our friend Colonel Ricardo, and heard

from him the remarkable story which I asked him to repeat to you before he brought you here. To you it may seem but an interesting legend, but to me it is more than that. I need not press the point; you are all young, and religion, to the young, is a thing apart from everyday life. I felt that I must carefully investigate the origin of the story before taking any definite action, but how I was to set about it without causing curious comment puzzled me until I thought of using Henry Judson.

"Now I wish to be perfectly frank with you, and I will confess that, though Mr Judson seemed, from a physical point of view, eminently fitted to be my emissary, I was not quite so certain of his suitability in other respects, and I doubt whether I should have employed him if it had not been that I was anxious to get him out of the way for a time. The position is now clear to you, and I need not explain further, but will merely add that I sent for Henry Judson, explained the matter to him, and asked if he would go. He put one question to me before he consented. 'If I succeed,' he said, 'will you reconsider my position?' I had expected this, and had my answer ready. 'That depends,' I replied, 'on how my daughter feels about it when you return.' He looked at me searchingly for a moment and then got up. 'All right, I trust you,' he said; 'I will go.'

"That was fifteen months ago, and I have had no direct news of him since. One draft which I gave him was cashed at the order of a Greek merchant in Kassala, and another, a month later, by a firm of Italian exporters in Asmara. Then, in September last, my daughter received a bracelet, made of the tail hair of an elephant, in an envelope which bore the Addis Abbaba postmark, dated 8th August. There was nothing but the bracelet in the envelope, and the address was written in an uneducated hand. So you see that it is now nine months since we have had news of any sort, and my daughter is wearing herself out with anxiety. She feels, I am afraid, that I sent her lover to his death."

The great banker paused for a moment. His eyes were troubled. None of us spoke. "Perhaps I did send him to his death," he resumed. "God forgive me if I misjudged him, for he was honest with me. But I need not trouble you with my personal affairs; what I need is advice. Has the time come when I should give up the idea of his bringing the mission to a successful conclusion and apply my energies to the task of tracing him? He may have met with greater difficulties than anticipated: I know nothing of the country myself, and cannot form an opinion. If I act prematurely I may undo the work of a year. That, gentlemen, is the point on which I ask you to

give me the benefit of your experience. You are familiar with the country, and you can judge the man from your knowledge of each other."

Young Hawkwood was the first to answer. He spoke more seriously than was his wont, and it was clear that the story and the personality of the speaker had impressed him. "I should give him time, sir," he said. "If he is dead he is dead, and you can do nothing to help him. If he is in difficulties he will find some way of communicating with you. Personally I know little of that side of the country, but I do know something of the Amharic language, and I should think it quite possible that he has been delayed by having to learn it. You can't do anything until you know the language of a country."

"Thank you, Captain Hawkwood," replied Mr Abelsburg. "Your ideas agree closely with my own—Judson, by the way, is an excellent linguist, as far as European languages are concerned—but you have forgotten one thing, to me the most important consideration of them all—that the suspense is telling on my daughter."

"I'm sorry," said Hawkwood contritely. "I confess that I was so interested in your account of Judson that I forgot your daughter."

Mr Abelsburg bowed politely and turned to me. For a moment I said nothing. My thoughts were far away. Again I saw myself bending over that whitened skeleton; again felt the fierce glare of the sun upon my back. Should I tell them my story for what it was worth? Hawkwood had heard it, and evidently did not connect the two. Was I jumping too rashly to conclusions? The expectant silence of the others brought me to myself. It was necessary to say something. "Mr Abelsburg," I began, "I have been thinking over what you have told us. I am afraid that it is only too probable that Judson is dead. I know, in part, the country he would have to traverse. It is wild and mountainous. The people are truculent and lawless. Strangers are looked on with suspicion. I should advise the gradual preparation of your daughter for the worst. Of course, there are numerous official channels through which information might be obtained; but official machinery, once set in action, is hard to stop. I suggest that you wait a little longer. In the meantime, if you will give me an accurate description of Judson, I will myself do what I can to trace him. My station is close to the frontier of Abyssinia, and from time to time merchants and others pass my way. It is possible that I may be able to find out something. But what about Judson's friends? Are they taking no action?"

"I know nothing of his friends," replied the banker stiffly. "I treated Mr Judson on his own merits."

"Still, that is a line which

ought to be followed," put in Ricardo. "You two are going to England; don't you think it would be a good thing to make discreet inquiries concerning Judson? His friends may have heard from him even though you, Mr Abelsburg, have not. I may say that I agree about not hurrying things if Miss Abelsburg's health will not suffer unduly from the delay. About that, of course, no one can judge except yourself."

The banker was looking at me intently. I am sure he knew that I had something on my mind, but, if so, he made no comment. "I thank you all for your advice," he said, rising. "We seem to agree upon the desirability of delay. I will do what I can to prepare my daughter for the bad news which I am afraid she will have to hear sooner or later. I will get from her as accurate a description as I can of Henry Judson, and will send it to you."

Hawkwood and I left next day for England, and I did not receive the promised description of the missing man until I had been in London for some days. When it did come, it contained, as I might have guessed, none of the things that I needed, being concerned with external features only, such as height, colour of hair, and eyes. I wrote immediately to Abelsburg and asked him for further details, more particularly as to teeth. To this letter I had no answer until just before I left England again at the end of my leave. Mr Abelsburg's reply was written from San Francisco, from which city he was, he said, leaving for Japan with his daughter in search of mental relaxation. He added that he could tell me nothing about Judson's teeth beyond the fact that they were not noticeable, but that his daughter said that he had had some work done on them by a dentist in Washington, and that he had asked his own physician to obtain information on the point and communicate with me direct.

I did not make any inquiries about Judson in England, for Hawkwood had undertaken to do this, saying that he would let me know what he found out, but as he had not done so up to the time of my departure, I returned to Africa with no very clear idea of what I was going to look for. To tell the truth, the whole thing had ceased to occupy a prominent position in my thoughts.

III. THE GOLDEN MOUSE.

When I reached headquarters on my return from leave I put in an application to be sent back to my old station. To my surprise it was immediately approved, for Carstairs, who

had taken my place, had been having constant attacks of malaria, and the doctors had recommended him for change of air. I had to wait two or three days for a boat, and spent my time reading the recent Intelligence Reports about Abyssinia. The news, as usual, was scanty, and dealt with unfamiliar names and places; but one item, which I noted with interest, reported that all the foreign representatives in Addis Abbaba had been approached with regard to an attempted theft from a monastery (location not stated), said to have been carried out at the instigation of a European disguised as a native woman. One of his accomplices had been caught and had confessed, but had not been able to give a very definite description of his employer. Nobody seemed to have had any knowledge of this supposed European, and the matter had dropped, though it had caused a good deal of excitement at the time. Our representative gave it as his opinion that the incident was merely an attempt to stir up anti-European feeling. I turned to the beginning of the report, and found that it was dated 14th June, but the date of the attempted theft was not stated. I hunted up my own report among the files dealing with raids over the Abyssinian border, and placed that and the Intelligence Report side by side before the head of the Department. He read them through.

"I see what you mean," he said. "You think the skeleton you found may be the remains of this bird who tried to rob the monastery."

"Yes," I answered, "it's possible, isn't it?"

"Possible, yes," he said, "but hardly likely. By the way, I made the inquiries you suggested when you were going on leave, and I can't find that any one is missing on this side of the border."

"Well, then, that makes it all the more likely, doesn't it?" I returned. "What had we better do about it?"

"Nothing, old boy," he said. "The thing is dead, why dig it up?"

"Dead—yes," I retorted, "but not buried."

"All right, then, delete the 'why dig it up,' and substitute 'bury it,'" he ended with a laugh.

I started upriver early in August, and reached my station at the end of the month. Before I left I wrote to Hawkwood, telling him that I was going back to the same place, and asking him to let me know if he had found out anything about Judson. I found Carstairs looking wretched, and got him off as soon as possible. He had not been able to get out to the rock before the rains started, so there was nothing more to be done until January at the earliest.

I won't dwell on the next few months. It was the usual fight against malaria and leak-

ing roofs. The water was too high for fishing, and the ground was too wet for anything but routine parades, so we just had to exist. In November I had a letter from Hawkwood. After the usual greetings he went on to say that he had met a man who knew Judson; reported him to be a good fellow, but did not know much about him except that he had a bit of money of his own, and spent most of his time on the Continent. Last time he had met him the poor devil was so much in love that he was no good for anything. Didn't know who the girl was, but gathered she was an American. Hadn't seen anything of him since. Hawkwood finished up his letter with a characteristic postscript:—

"I have just been reading up Adowa in Creasy," he wrote. "It was an awful give-away for the Italians. It almost seems as if the Abyssinians might have been carrying the Ark of the Covenant in the van of their army. What about it? I don't think!"

And then, about Christmas, I received a letter with an American stamp. It proved to be a formal typewritten report from a doctor in Washington, sent, as he was careful to state, at the request of one of his clients, Mr Jacob Abelsburg. An extract from a dentist's report was attached, and I turned to it eagerly. The first part was too technical for me to understand, but the last item, "*Left Lower Wisdom . . . Gold Crown*"—gave me a queer chill down the spine. I felt sure then that my surmise was correct, and that the lone skeleton on the rock was all that remained of Henry Judson.

My impatience to visit the great stone again may be imagined. I found it hard to concentrate my mind on the training of the company, and every day marked with eager eyes the drying up of the long grass which covered the country and rendered travelling impossible except along the beaten tracks. I began in February a series of practice marches, taking a good many men and all the animals each time. It was good training for the company after being cooped up in the fort all through the rains, and it served also to clear a good road part of the way.

Finally, in the first week of March, I started. I had obtained permission from headquarters to make a rough survey of the chain of pools along which the raiders had penetrated last year, so my temporary absence from the station would cause no comment. I took only four men besides my servants, and for transport we had two little donkeys purchased on my way up, and two of my company mules, so we travelled in comfort and carried enough water to allow for any eventuality. This time everything went well. The grass was not nearly so burnt that spring as it had been the previous year, and I was afraid we might miss the rock, but we hadn't

been going more than three hours on the second morning when one of the men sighted it about a mile away on our left front.

Our luck was in that morning without any doubt, for a few minutes after we had turned in the direction of the rock a fine white-eared kob stepped out from a patch of grass about two hundred yards away and stood watching our approach with interest, but without any alarm. Up to this I had refrained from shooting anything, as I had not wished to delay the march; but now, within a few minutes of our halt, I decided that a little meat would not come amiss. Motioning the men to lead on, I sat down on the ground and took a steady shot. I seldom used to shoot at anything over a hundred yards, for there was no lack of game, and it is a pity to risk wounding when, by taking a little trouble, you can make pretty certain of a kill; but on this occasion I felt quite sure of myself—my luck was in! And I was not mistaken. The little beast just hunched up its back—shrugged its shoulders, you might almost say,—and sank quietly down without moving from its tracks. The men gave a shout of triumph, and my cook, drawing a long knife from his belt, rushed forward to cut the animal's throat before the blood had ceased to flow. I doubt if he was in time.

Leaving the men to cut up the meat and put it on the mules, I walked on by myself to the great stone. My heart was beating fast with excitement, and I felt a rare exaltation of mood, whether at my successful shot or at the prospect of fulfilling the object of my quest I don't know. This time the pool below the rock held water—muddy water, it is true, but plenty of it, and quite fit for the animals to drink. What a difference from the terrible conditions of last year! After examining the tracks in the wet mud at the edge of the pool, it occurred to me that I might as well get up on top of the rock and look things over before the others arrived. The tree was thornier than ever, but my skin was at least no softer than it had been, and presently I sprang from the projecting branch on to the flattened top of the great boulder.

I noticed a change at once, and for a moment it seemed to me that some one must have visited this lonely spot during the long months of my absence; but as I looked more closely I perceived that the alteration was simply the result of the natural processes of decay. I had left a skeleton; I returned to find a heap of bones. The ribs, which before had formed a hollow cage, had fallen in and were lying beside the separated elements of the backbone; the skull, freed from its attachment, had rolled upon its side, and feet and hands had lost their human form. The significance of the change

came to me as I stood there looking down upon all that was left of Henry Judson. Last April the skeleton must have been fresh! How long, I wondered, would it take the birds to remove all traces of the flesh, for surely no beast of prey could have reached this inaccessible spot. Not long, indeed, I knew, for often I had seen the carcass of an animal reduced to a skeleton in a matter of days.

Stooping down, I picked up the skull. As I did so the jawbone fell away and, bouncing on the rock, dropped into the crack which I have described as splitting the surface of the stone from side to side. Remembering that the dentist's report had said left lower wisdom . . . gold crown, I knelt down and reached my hand into the crevice towards where I saw the white gleam of the bone about a foot below. The crack at this point was narrow, and I had a little difficulty in working the irregular jawbone to the surface, and when I had done so I found, to my surprise, that I had brought up as well a little cylinder of native leather such as many of the Sudanese wear slung round their necks or elbows as charms against the evil eye.

"Funny thing for a white man to wear," I thought to myself, and laid it on the rock while I examined the jaw. Some of the teeth had dropped out, dislodged no doubt by the fall, but there, on the left side, the hindmost of the teeth showed the dull gleam of a gold cap. "Poor Judson," I said aloud, and laying the bone aside, picked up the leather charm. It was remarkably heavy, I noticed, for one of those little amulets, which as a rule contain only a slip of paper inscribed with a verse from the Koran, so thinking that I might as well see what caused the weight I took my knife and slit the thing open.

And now I come to the incident which has seemed to me so unbelievable that I have hesitated for years to set it down, and would probably never have done so but for the monstrous coincidence with which I opened my story. That incident has convinced me that nothing is impossible in real life, however incredible the circumstances might appear in fiction. With this apology, then, I resume my tale at the point where, fired by curiosity, I slit open the leather cylinder, expecting to find a roll of paper weighted with a lump of lead, and found instead a perfect little golden mouse!

The thing was so life-like that I almost dropped it. From the tip of its sensitive nose to the utmost detail of its little feet it was perfection. The eyes were fashioned of some deep-red stones, rubies probably, and one tiny tooth, which showed beneath the carven whiskers, seemed to be an inlay of ivory. How long I sat and gazed at this amazing jewel I do not know. The

voices of my men, laughing and talking as they approached the pool, aroused me, and, slipping the mouse into my pocket, I rose to my feet determined to explore further the crevice which had yielded such unexpected treasure. I stepped to the edge of the rock, intending to call down to my servant to pass me up a stick with which to search, and was just raising my hand to beckon when some instinct made me glance sideways at the crack. Something was sliding quietly among the heap of bones—something menacing! I was giddy and dazed from suddenly standing up after sitting so long in the hot sun, and for a moment my eyes were only conscious of movement, and then I knew—a puff adder! I had not seen the thing before, though I had been sitting not three feet from the spot. Perhaps it had only just emerged from the crevice. I loathe snakes; and the horrible fat body and stumpy tail of this species in particular has always filled me with horror. I was in no danger, of course, for snakes as a rule do not attack unless molested; but in my sudden alarm I must have stepped backwards, for I remember my left foot treading into vacancy, and then, after a momentary struggle to regain my balance, I fell from the top of the rock. The next thing I remember is my servant bathing my forehead.

I thought that I was only stunned, but when I got to my feet I found that I must have sprained my left ankle, for it hurt me to walk. My boy took off my boot and bathed the foot, and that eased it a good deal, but, to my dismay, when I came to put on the boot again, the foot had swelled so much that it couldn't be done. Also I felt sick, and got rid of my breakfast a few minutes after I had eaten it, so I may have suffered more than I thought. The men rigged up a shelter for me, and I lay under that during the heat of the day and thought things over.

I did not show the golden mouse to anybody, but gloated over it by myself when the servants had left me and gone to lie down. Where had Judson picked up this marvellous thing, and what artist had fashioned it? And then my thoughts turned to Judson himself. I pictured him, poor devil, alone against the feudal savagery of the Abyssinian lords; his plot discovered, his identity and disguise betrayed by one of his companions; the whole country on the watch. That must be the reason why he had turned south instead of taking the nearest road to civilisation and safety. I imagined him passing precariously along the disputed zones between the territories of warring chieftains, avoiding the too obvious route along the upper waters of the Blue Nile, and striking south towards the swamps and watercourses which take their way westwards across the plains

between the mountains and the Great River. Then, perhaps at some rumour of pursuit, flying across the border and tramping wearily over that endless plain. How had he reached the great stone? God alone knew that, or what suffering he had endured before he climbed painfully to the top, to look perhaps for landmarks or to rest a while in safety from beasts of prey. How had he died? That, too, must remain a mystery. Exhaustion, hunger, disease; perhaps—and I shuddered at the thought of that flat reptilian head and bloated body. And then, quite suddenly, I wondered how he had been dressed. I had not noticed any clothes on the top of the rock. That was an omission. I had been too intent on other matters to mark any details beyond the things which first had caught the eye. Should I climb the rock again? No, I was not able; and even if I had not hurt my ankle—no again. Nor send a soldier. "No," I said to myself, "let Henry Judson rest in peace, now that he *is* at peace." I summoned the corporal of my escort. "Cut down that tree," I ordered, "and burn it. That rock is of evil omen to all who climb it." The man looked at me strangely, but presently I heard the noise of chopping, and knew that Henry Judson's remains would watch over the plain from henceforth undisturbed.

At three o'clock we took the road again. The animals and men were rested and refreshed, but my own spirits were at their lowest ebb. Gone was the exalted mood of the morning, gone the satisfaction of a mission accomplished. My head ached, and my eyes resented the glare of the declining sun. I rode on one of the mules, for I could not walk with comfort. The saddle was meant for baggage, and the battens galled me. Sorry ending, indeed, to a day so well begun!

But I need not dwell on the march, for it was without incident, though brim full of discomfort, until, on the following afternoon about an hour before sunset, we saw before us the first of the chain of pools which it had been my intention to survey. My head still ached, and I fancy that there was fever in my blood. At any rate, whatever the cause, I had tossed all through the night disturbed by strange dreams, and during my waking hours thoughts chased each other through my brain as in the flickering brilliance of a cinema. Long grass and thorn bushes fringed the pool, and extended some distance out into the plain. As we approached the water along a wide track well trodden by game, my corporal stepped quickly to my side, and laying a hand upon my arm, pointed with the other to a patch of reeds some thirty yards away. "Asad!" he whispered in intense excitement.

I looked in the direction indicated, and as I turned a

magnificent full-grown lion stepped from the cover and stood there in the sunlight, motionless as a statue save for a slow swishing of his tail. Quietly I slipped from the mule's back, unconscious of pain in putting my foot to the ground, and keeping my eye on the splendid beast, took my heavy rifle from the boy, who held it ready to my hand. I always carried a few cartridges for this rifle, a double-barrelled ·450, loose in the pocket of my jacket, and now, as quickly as possible, I slipped a couple into the chambers. All this time the lion had not moved, but at the faint click of the closing breech he gave a fierce growl and swung round as if about to charge. I had not thought of that, my only fear being that he would bolt before I could get a chance, and in the moment of surprise I suppose I jerked a little in my shot. The impact of the heavy bullet flung him to the ground, but he was up in an instant, and, with the most nerve-shattering roar that I have ever heard, sprang into the cover of the reeds.

I must have been under some evil influence that day, for in my saner moments I should never have dashed forward as I did opening the breech of my rifle as I ran. I heard a warning shout from my corporal, a yell of fear from one of my servants, and at a sound of crashing in the grass, I turned half left to face a charging lioness. I ought to have guessed from the behaviour of the male that there was a lioness with cubs about, but it had never crossed my mind.

My left hand was in my pocket groping for a cartridge. It seized something, and pulling it out, I jammed it into the chamber. It stuck! Involuntarily my eye dropped to see the cause—it was the golden mouse! I had no time to curse, but jerked it out on to the ground, slammed to the breech, and pulled both triggers as the lioness sprang.

I was not as much hurt as I deserved to be, for the unaimed bullet from my left barrel took the beast in the open mouth and crashed through into her brain. She was dead when she landed on me, but her claws were out, and tore me cruelly on the left leg. Incidentally her weight broke two of my ribs, and knocked me out so completely that I was unconscious for several days. And when I did recover, it was to awake in a world of torment. My servants and the men were wonderful, and it is to them that I owe my life as much as to the doctor who broke all trekking records in coming to my aid.

It was early March when I was damaged, but it was mid-May before I was able to be sent north, a shattered wreck with the left leg of my trousers empty from the knee down. During the early weeks of those two months I fancy that I was delirious most of the time. The doctor who was

with me said that I raved for hours about a mouse, which struck him as funny when I had been mauled by a lion. But quite early on, he said, I had a quiet day, appearing perfectly myself; and when he visited me in the morning I had dictated a cable to be sent to one Jacob Abelsburg in the United States to tell him that Henry Judson was dead. After that I had sunk again into delirium, but the cable was sent, though no acknowledgment had been received.

I kept my own counsel over the matter of Henry Judson and the golden mouse. The thing was so bizarre that I feared to tell the doctor, and it was too complex a story to assemble for the benefit of such friends as came to see me during my convalescence. But when I had regained to some extent my strength, I wrote a short account of it to Hawkwood. It did not need so much explaining to him. His answer, like all his letters, was short.

"My dear old boy," he wrote, "you must have had a touch of sun on the rock, and then, on top of that, concussion when you fell off—fall due to sun and not to a snake? Jacob Abelsburg is dead; perhaps you missed seeing it when you were ill; he died somewhere in China, what of I don't know." And then a postscript, as usual, and it is the postscript which interests me most. "By the by, reference your tale of the mouse, look up First Samuel, Chapter VI.; it may interest you."

As soon as I had a chance I turned up the reference. It tells how the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord was returned to the Israelites by the Philistines who had captured it but found its possession a doubtful blessing, and how the diviners and priests recommended that a trespass offering should be returned with it; and then it goes on—

> "Then, said they, what shall be the trespass offering which we shall return to him? They answered, . . . five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines; for one plague was on you all and on your lords."

I have often thought over this thing since; it all seems so clear to me that I simply cannot believe it was just a touch of the sun.

THE ADVENTURES OF GILBERT BLAKHAL.

I.

A COUNTERPART in real life to the heroes of 'The Three Musketeers' and 'Twenty Years After.' That, in essentials, is Gilbert Blakhal. His authentic adventures are of the same period, and he was as intrepid. When upwards of three score years and ten he could say he had never suffered an affront. It is to this quality we owe his book, 'A Breiffe Narration of the Services done to Three Noble Ladyes.' The original manuscript, written one hundred and fifty years before Dumas put pen to paper, was edited for the Spalding Club in 1844, and the work, which deserves to be widely known, has unaccountably been allowed to remain in this respectable obscurity.

Blakhal was the offshoot of an Aberdeenshire family, and, like Aramis, a priest. He entered the Scots College at Rome in 1626. On leaving it four years afterwards his adventures began. A cousin in France, Mr James Forbes, was charged with the affairs of Lady Isabel Hay, fifth daughter of the Earl of Errol, and he engaged him to be her confessor. She was the first of his three ladies. As Mr Forbes' visits were frequent and untimely, Blakhal was requested to admonish him. A small happening, it shaped his career. Forbes, "blasting out very disdainful words," schemed to marry the lady whether by fair means or foul. The Earl died, and an intimation came that no money would be forthcoming should she stay in France. Blakhal, always at his best in a battle of wits, turned the tables on Mr Forbes; but he could not induce Lady Isabel to go home. Though perturbed she was resolute, nay wilful: a heretic husband was among the things that were forbidden, and she knew of no catholic in Scotland fit for her.

Six months at a monastery portionless cured Lady Isabel of any liking for that sort of life, and Blakhal, himself in hardly better case as chaplain to a counsellor at Paris, was entreated to get for her a canonicat in Mons. A chanoinesse was not cloistered, and enjoyed a pension for life, or until marriage. Making inquiries, he found that she might almost as reasonably have asked him for the moon. The greatest of the nobles solicited these desirable benefices for their daughters, and often failed to obtain them. He had no influence, and no influential friends. She had none either. Nevertheless she was insistent that he should go to Brussels and see what he could do with the Infanta Isabella of Spain,

Princess of the Low Countries, in whose gift the appointments lay; and, to pacify her, he departed on a fool's errand, as everybody thought. Lacking a sponsor they deemed a hearing unlikely. Also his paucity of means was disabling. Affairs moved slowly at court, and nothing was done without gold. He had but fifty crowns, his "gages" from the counsellor. These imposed a rigid time limit, if nothing worse.

At Brussels all were soliciting for themselves or others, and none he tried would help. Still he was little inclined to return finger in mouth. He said to himself that having embarked on the enterprise his honour was engaged, and an honest man was a lion in his own cause. For a week he mixed with the suite of the Duke of Orleans, who was on a visit to the Infanta, and gained admittance to the Chamber of Audience undiscovered. But this could not last. The valets fell to the trick, and shut the door in his face. A pistole of gold to the door-keeper opened it again. If a novice at court, Blakhal was versed in the ways of menials; from his scanty store he gave as much to three others. This made him free of the Chamber, where unhindered he went every day. In that wise he bided his time, getting acquainted with its usages, the while thinking out well what he was to say to the Infanta should an opportunity offer.

He confesses that he got his audience under something like false pretences. When confident that he would neither stutter nor stand dumb in the presence, he spoke to the Count de Noel, Master of the Household, through whom only an audience could be obtained. It was past mid-day, the Princess was fasting, and he promised to be brief.

Blakhal succeeded in his well-nigh impossible task, an unknown priest pleading for an unknown lady, and both foreigners; but he did not keep his promise to be brief. That was impossible. "I promised to be very brief. And so I was, considering the matter that I had to deduce." For "a good half-hour" the Princess heard him and forgot her hunger, only interrupting once, to ask Lady Isabel's age. We may suppose that she had never listened to such a moving tale before. He told of the "much but never enough renowned" Earl of Errol, Constable of Scotland, how for the catholic faith he had been long in exile, and three divers times suffered imprisonment, "and stayed long at every time." How his castle was blown up. How he was taken in Zeeland, and was to have been sent to Queen Elizabeth in England, who had despatched a warship for him, if he had not escaped. How he had assisted and protected the catholics while he lived, and how, now that he was dead, his daughter, rather than return among heretics, would earn a living with her needle, if need be. And then, under cover of

asking a favour, Blakhal put the case as he wished her to see it. It savours of a liberty, but was not taken as such. He begged, should his suit not be granted, that it be not mentioned to any one; for should it come to the ears of some people in Scotland, they would say: "Follow the example of our Constable, and let your houses be thrown down for your religion, your Papist princes will build them up again, and will give as much to your children as the Infanta of Spain, so highly cried up for her charity, did give to the Constable his daughter, who sent a priest to Brussels to procure from that so renowned Princess a power canonicat, and was refused." She said she knew they would, and assured him, howsoever the matter might go, that no one would know but the Master of the Household, and he would keep it secret; she would do what she could to give him satisfaction, and he was to come some other day for an absolute answer.

Blakhal was sincere, but by no means simple-minded. The vague "some other day" may have struck him as ominous, or served to remind him that his first audience might well be the last where there were so many competing interests. At all events he very deftly led the Princess to fix a definite date for another interview. He said he would not come again until she had time to get information both of the lady and of himself. "Nay," she rejoined, "come when you will, I require no more information than you have given me; you ask nothing for yourself, but only for a lady, who will be known soon enough. I will only see if I can persuade the lady to whose daughter I have promised the first vacant benefice, to pass from that, and be content of the first thereafter, which I shall know very shortly. Therefore, come when you please." He replied, "Madame, I shall come Tuesday next," and she said, "Do so." The Count de Noel, fuming, went in as he came out, and complained that the Princess had been kept fasting. "Nay," said she, "I do not blame but much commend him for a very charitable man; he hath come from Paris here, out of pure charity, to solicit me for a canonicat of Mons for a lady of his country, and hath not asked anything for himself. I would hear, with great contentment, many priests procuring charitably for others, and nothing ask for themselves. Therefore I esteem him a truly charitable priest, and will do what I can to contribute to his charity." Upon hearing this from the Master of the Household, Blakhal conceived good hope of a favourable issue.

On the Tuesday he was told to bring Lady Isabel. She was to get the first vacant canonicat. Until then the Princess would keep her at court. And he had the hardihood to ask it in writing.

He represented that the enemies of religion were many. If Lady Isabel came to Brussels with him on his unsupported word, it might be construed to the detriment of the lady's character and his own, "all which your Majesty may hinder, if you will do her the honour to give me a letter to her, wherein you command her to come to your Majesty." The Infanta thought this well considered. "Go you to my secretary, Faillia," she said. "I shall give him an order to give you a letter for her."

The secretary turned the writing of the letter over to his deputy, and "that red-headed fellow" kept putting him off with promises. Possibly this was where a long purse might have come in useful. At mass ten or twelve days later the Princess perceiving Blakhal, sent for him. She wanted to know why he stayed so long. On learning the reason she was wroth, and the secretary got a scolding; but the deputy was unmoved. After some days more he was obliged to give a pistole of gold to one of the valets de chambre to place a placet before her. This brought matters to a head. The secretary was informed that the Princess would sign the letter with her own hand, and that before she went to bed. So in the event Blakhal was the gainer. He placated the disgruntled deputy with a pistole, one of the few he had left.

His return journey with emptied pockets was in itself an adventure. Two robbers who had the misfortune to hold him up in a forest between Mons and Maubeuge got more badinage than money. He was taken at a disadvantage, armed only with a sword, and perched on a cart, "not finding any other commodity." The next day he was able to hire a horse, "for I had yet in my little pocket a pistole of gold, which the robbers might have found if they had searched my pockets; but they durst not light down from their horses, being laden with heavy armour, nor let me down from the cart, fearing that I might run in the wood where they could not follow me." From Cambrai to St Quentin he was forced to go on foot, bearing his boots on his shoulder, as a horseman newly dismounted, which "they who did meet me did think." At St Quentin a fellow-countryman and schoolfellow lent him four crowns, and became bail for a horse. So he won his way to Paris. Lady Isabel was at Provins, another eighteen leagues. This meant more money. The counsellor was in Poitou, but a cousin of his advanced five pistoles. Thus replenished he delivered the Infanta's letter. The hire of the horse, he says, made a breach in his five pistoles, "but I did not regard what I did spend for the service of that lady."

Lady Isabel likewise had no money. She came to Paris by water, with her maid and an

old pensioned retainer of her father's, Alexander Davidson, who waited on her at his own charges, and Blakhal was despatched to Dieppe to borrow forty pistoles from the laird of Balgowny.[1] He came home again as light, "which did grieve her much." The Superior of the Scots College was next approached, "and notwithstanding the friendship that he professed to her, he made her wait three weeks in Paris, spending both time and money, before she could get a farthing from him." Blakhal suspected the malign influence of Mr Forbes. At last he paid up, and after eleven days "tossed to and fro, up and down, and from side to side in the coach, worse than in a ship, except that the smell of the sea is worse," they reached Brussels.

Blakhal's part was far from played. To begin with, Lady Isabel, at the hour appointed by the Princess for her audience, calmly said she would go some other day. As she was like to persevere in that mind, and the carriage was at the door, Blakhal bundled her into it, "what with goodwill and what with ill." This was not the least of the services he rendered her. Otherwise all would have been lost. She never saw the Princess again. Next morning the Infanta was in a high fever; within a week she was dead.

They were "betwixt hope and despair." Lady Isabel esteemed Alexander Davidson's judgment, and that worthy advised her to go away in time, either back again to France, or home to Scotland, for otherwise she would be forced to sell her clothes and go away naked; "which did go near to undo her fortune." The hope lay in the Princess' death-bed testament, which was not to be read until the fortieth day. "God Almighty," says Blakhal, "doth well know, but none other, what grief and dolorous affliction my heart did suffer from that day forth until Candlemas, being all that time in great incertitude whether her Majesty had remembered my poor lady or not in her last will." Every day he went to one or other of the seven who were at the writing of it, but they were bound to secrecy. He even tackled her confessor, but was rudely repulsed, though he "spoke to him with as much respect as if he had been primate." The others were civil, which, in the light of his persistency, he took for a good sign. It was all he had to put against Alexander Davidson's common-sense conviction, that the Princess in a violent fever was not likely to remember Lady Isabel when she had many matters of State to think about. Yet his persuasions prevailed. Lady Isabel waited on.

[1] Mr Menzies of Balgowny. One-third of their rents was granted to the banished catholic lairds, to be forfeited should they return, besides the penalty of fine and imprisonment.

At last the forty days ran their course. The will, it transpired, had been made twelve years before. There was only one codicil, and it dealt with Lady Isabel, giving her the first vacant canonicat in Mons, with a pension of one thousand livres till she should be in possession of her benefice. Further, the dying Princess, holding the hand of the Archbishop of Malines, had laid this injunction upon him: "If it had pleased God to prolong my life, I intended to be a mother unto her, and provide her; but since it is His will to call me from her, I charge you, as you shall give an account at the last day, to be a father unto her, and see my will towards her executed punctually." This Blakhal had from the archbishop himself.

Taking everything into consideration, what Blakhal had accomplished was little short of marvellous. And Lady Isabel's relations in Scotland thought him a knave. Mr Forbes had seen to that. Hearing of the death of the Princess, he wrote to the Earl of Errol a letter "both false and scandalous." Blakhal, in ignorance of it, only incidentally re-established his good name. Lady Isabel never mentioned him in her letters. The Laird of Craig had befriended them when they were left high and dry in Paris, and as he was on his way to Scotland he asked Blakhal to let him know the outcome of their journey, good or bad. He and his wife were old friends of Lady Isabel and her family. On his return to Paris to take up his duties with the counsellor, Blakhal, in fulfilment of his promise, sent the laird a full account of all that had happened. This letter went the round. The Earl on reading it, at once congratulated his sister on the happy turn in her affairs, and in the revulsion of his feelings said that if ever Blakhal came to Scotland he would be his protector, and never suffer him to want so long as he should have wherewith to assist him. Alas for the sequel. Lady Isabel jumped to the conclusion that Blakhal had written to the Earl, and in a great passion accused him of seeking thanks from her friends for the service he had done to her. In unrestrained language she imputed the meanest of motives. It was a gross affront. He answered that he had not written to any of her people, that she knew of his promise to write to the Laird of Craig, that if he went to Scotland he would refrain from her noble kindred, and that he did not seek thanks nor reward from them or from her: whatever service he had rendered her he did it for God more than for her, or for them, whom he had never seen. Lady Isabel did not reply, and he heard from her no more.

II.

The next three years of Blakhal's life were uneventful. He remained with the aged counsellor until he died, and was left a legacy of two hundred crowns. With this sum at his command he resolved to go home, and in September 1636 arrived in London. Here by an extraordinary coincidence he met Alexander Davidson, also on his way to the north. Lady Isabel had got her canonicat, and he was no longer required or desired. With him was a Jesuit, Father Mortimer. They each bought a horse and travelled in company. It did not suit either of these false-hearted loons that Blakhal should get to Scotland, but he was unsuspecting at the time. "We were merry," he says, "and made a good voyage." At Harbottle Castle in Northumberland, Father Mortimer persuaded Blakhal to stay for a time as priest to Mr Widdrington, uncle of Lord Widdrington. It was a trap. Having crossed the border a matter of only five miles, Mortimer proceeded to make it impossible for Blakhal to follow. The Jesuits wanted none but priests of their own order in Scotland. Mr Widdrington had taken the oath of allegiance, and on this pretext Blakhal was denounced as a heretic to be excluded from the society of all catholics. The scheme might have worked with another than Blakhal. When they conveyed to him that no catholic house in Scotland would receive him until he should submit himself to the Superior of the Jesuits, he sent them word that he presumed the Superior was not so ignorant of his own power as to think it extended over the clergy, and started forthwith for Aberdeenshire.

The Jesuits, of course, were not to be defied with impunity, but, although the embargo was never lifted, Blakhal remained "in the countries adjacent to Aberdeen from the twelfth of August 1637 until the midst of April 1642," when he returned to France. The first thing he did was to call on Father Christy, the Superior of the Jesuits, to borrow a chasuble for a week or two until he could get one made for himself, but he "could not obtain that, nor so much as bread to say mass." This was his method of putting Father Christy in his place, and it was unmistakable. He gained access to six houses only, at all others he was denied, going once every month to each for one night. The rest of the time he lodged in taverns, with his horse and man, upon his own charges—until he went to the Lady of Aboyne.

Blakhal abstained from Lady Isabel's kith and kin. The Lady of Aboyne was a sister and a widow. Viscount Melgum and Lord Aboyne, a son of the

Marquis of Huntly, had perished at the burning of Frendraught. Taking for granted that Father Mortimer had closed Scotland to Blakhal, Alexander Davidson posed to her as Lady Isabel's benefactor. *He* procured the canonicat, and there was not one true word in Blakhal's letter to the Laird of Craig. It was not a successful imposture. Lady Aboyne was shrewd enough to see through his story. She quoted to him the old saw that "a dumb man never won fair lady." Davidson spoke no language but his own. Moreover, as she said, could he have spoken, who would have given credit to the words of a clubish fellow in such a matter? When Blakhal appeared in Aberdeenshire Davidson confessed, and he was told to write in her name asking him to Aboyne. Blakhal received the letter, "but did not think for all that to go to see her, nor no other of her kindred." As he did not come, and she wondered why, Alexander Davidson told how Lady Isabel had taunted him, at which she was greatly shamed, and wishing to make amends besought her uncle, Father William Gordon, brother of the first Marquis of Huntly, to seek him out. Sore against his will he accompanied Gordon to Aboyne. He would more willingly have gone into the Dee up to the ears, he says, although it was November. Notwithstanding which, Lady Aboyne was the second of the three noble ladies to whom he rendered rare service.

By the middle of 1638 his position became untenable. The few who received him were abandoned by the Jesuit priests. In July, on going to take leave of Lady Aboyne, he found to his astonishment that she as well was banned because of him. Father Leslie,[1] her ordinary, had gone off, and sent word that he would come no more; she could provide herself with her French Monsieur. Lady Aboyne, though devout, was a woman of spirit. She urged Blakhal to remain. His inclination ran contrary, and having small faith in her constancy, he refused; but in this she surprised him. She told him frankly that, if they made stir to get him out again, as he feared, they would not prevail if he carried himself well; if he gave scandal at home or abroad, he would owe the separation not to them, nor to her, but to his own self. So, constrained to stay, he entered, all unknowing, on a fresh adventure.

The times were troublous, and the castle of Aboyne was defenceless. Bands of covenanters and anti-covenanters overran the country. "They

[1] In May 1647 he was seized, conveyed to Aberdeen, and committed to gaol. In March 1648 he was in Edinburgh gaol; but through the influence of Count Montreal, the French Ambassador, he was released from prison in July 1648, and ordered to quit the realm, under the penalty of death should he venture to return.

who had nothing of their own to lose were, or at least feigned themselves to be, of a contrary faction to those who had means, but wanted force enough to defend them." The servants' swords, Alexander Davidson's pair of pistols "for parade"—he had never fired one in his life,—and Blakhal's own four pistols were all the weapons in the house. Alive to the necessity, he purchased firearms and procured others on his bond. The King sent muskets by ship to the Marquis of Huntly to arm his "loyal subjects," but these mostly fell into the hands of the covenanters, and when Montrose took Aberdeen he got the rest. Oddly enough the first menace to Aboyne came from the Marquis of Huntly's own men of Badenoch. They had been to Aberdeen getting arms—forty or thereabouts—and were commanded by "a proud and saucy rascal" named Gordon. Fearing that the porter might be simple enough to let them in, Blakhal kept the key of the gate in his pocket. When an insolent message was brought to him from their leader, he went to the wicket with six stout fellows, every one with a sword at his side and a gun in his hand. These he placed all on one side, so that they, being new soldiers, would not shoot one another. He opened the wicket a little, and Gordon, demanding money and lodging, pressed with his shoulder, so that his men might rush in. Blakhal, pistol in hand, left him in no doubt as to his fate. Then he said: "But put in your head and see how we are prepared to receive you, and tell your neighbours that you shall get no monies here than which shall come out of these guns, nor lodging unless it be graves to bury you; and, therefore, retire yourself that I may shut the gate."

His handling of the raiding Camerons was even more masterly. Fifty or so were in the court of the castle before he knew of their coming, and "like simple fools" they allowed him to outwit them, when they might have been master of the house. Only he and the porter were within. Under one pretence or another he kept them in play until the serving men began to come in, and when he had a sufficient number at his back the clansmen had to go, though with menaces. These they made good. A tenant was despoiled and Lady Aboyne's chamberlain attacked. They were at the house of the latter when the news was brought to Blakhal. He did not wait for the tenants, but set out with what men he had. His intention was to surprise the raiders in the house plundering. To do this he made his men march as the highlanders, one after the other without a word. Every man was instructed in what was required of him. They were close to the house before they were discovered, and rushed the courtyard. The door was shut on them, but it was no part of Blakhal's

plan to enter the house. That would have entailed a hand-to-hand fight at a disadvantage. As prearranged, his men thrust their muskets through the windows ready to shoot any highlander who lifted a weapon. They were three to one and no risks were taken. Blakhal himself was at the door, and as it was being bolted sent a bullet through it. The surprise was complete, but the highlanders, when called upon to surrender, were in no mood to comply. When, however, they saw the light of the straw he kindled to throw on the thatch of the roof, they called for quarter. This was a ruse on his part. Although he threatened to burn the house, he could not do it. The chamberlain and his family and servants were all tied up inside. Blakhal told their leader to come out with his gun under his arm, stock foremost. If any man pressed after him he would be shot. He came as ordered, and Blakhal took the gun, discharged it, and laid it on the ground. He then dictated his terms. They were to restore what they had pillaged, and depart out of Lady Aboyne's lands. As each man came out Blakhal discharged his gun to the number of six or eight and forty. The tenants hearing the shots gathered until they were nearly as many as the enemy, all armed; and ranked "like two hedges," he passed the highlanders through them to the place where their empty pieces lay. After that he marched his captives to the Dee, and stood by the water-side until the boat ferried the last across.

The discomfited captain of the Camerons said to him, "Sir, you have been happy in surprising us, for if our watchman had advertised us before your entry in the court but only so long as we might have taken our arms in our hands and gone to the court, we could have killed you all before you had come near us, we being covered from you, and you in an open field to us; or if we had but gone the first to the windows, we could have beaten you out of the court, or killed you all in it." To which Blakhal replied, "Good friend, you think you had to do with children, but know that I was a soldier before you could wipe your own nose." One smiles at the bombast, and thinks of Porthos, but what a soldier he would have made! The raiders returned to Lochaber with a prey of cattle, and killed some men who resisted them. They carried nothing away from Aboyne.

III.

The death of Lady Aboyne in 1642 launched Blakhal on an adventure which definitely classes him with Athos for single-minded devotion, and D'Artagnan in audacity and

finesse. She had pleaded with him, and he had promised, to bring up her daughter, an only child of thirteen, in the catholic religion, and not abandon her among heretics. Again he was undertaking something like the impossible. On the day he left Aboyne his sole worldly possessions were a horse, and less than half a pistole in silver. He was a fugitive. There was no protection for him now that Lady Aboyne was dead. He would have been a good prize to the soldiers of what he calls the unholy covenant. Wherever he went he was in danger. But for his courage and address, he would have been killed by drunken soldiery at a lonely inn on the Moor of Rhynie. The Synod was sitting at Aberdeen, and the minions of the ministers tracked him from place to place. They were close on his heels when he rode into Aberdeen and sold his horse, "for not the half that it was worth." They learned that he was in the town, and the clerk of the Synod, "a catholic at heart," warned him. There was no safety on shore, so he went on board a ship lying in the roads, which, as it was not due to sail for five days, called for explanation. The gunner was his friend, and said to the captain, "Skipper, I know that gentleman, and also what maketh him come so soon to your ship. He is bred in France, and cannot endure drinking. He hath many acquaintances here, who, if they find him, will force him to be drunk every day, and to eschew them he is come to lie quietly in your ship, choosing rather to be sea-sick than wine-sick. I know very well both the man and his humour; he is cousin to my wife, his name is Captain King." Coming from his gunner, the captain believed the tale. It had been concocted by Blakhal in the man's house the night before. He landed at Campvere, and entertained the captain, his mate, and the gunner, and the captain of a Dutch man-of-war and his mate, to breakfast, the last two with a view to further facilities. "We did sit down at nine of the clock, and, after the Dutch fashion, did begin with butter, but ended with the best cheer that the inn could afford us; for the dinner did follow the breakfast, and the four hours or goulte the dinner, and the supper the goulte, until midnight." The Dutch captain was exceeding drunk. Blakhal drank as much as any of the company, he says, but the care to keep himself undiscovered in that "puritanical place" hindered the wine from taking effect. He sailed to Newhaven in the Dutch man-of-war!

The girl's grandmother, widow of the first Marquis of Huntly, was in Paris, and Blakhal hoped she might send for her. Failing that he would seek the aid of Anne of Austria, Queen of France. The old lady said no, and kept to it. She was past caring what happened

to her granddaughter, and lived only a few days longer. His friends scoffed at the idea of the Queen bringing a lady out of Scotland to bestow her charity upon. He asked the Abbé Chambers, a Scotsman, to get some one to introduce him at court. "No," said he, "for if I were to recommend you to any man for that he would think us both fools, and me the greatest, who should know better." As at Brussels, Blakhal was obliged to open up a way for himself. When he had spent some disconsolate days at St Germains, where the court was, he spoke to an officer of Her Majesty's Guard. He never knew his name, had not seen him before, and never saw him again. This gentleman took him to Madame de la Flotte, dame d'atours to the Queen. The Queen was so interested in what Madame de la Flotte told her of his tale that she must hear it from Blakhal himself. By a great stroke of luck the Marquis of Huntly was known to her. When Lord Gordon he had commanded the Scots Guards of her husband, Louis XIII. She said, "He will not refuse to send her to me, upon my letter." Blakhal had to explain that it was not as simple as that. "I said, madame, he may not avow the sending of her, because it is a crime to send out or take out any child of her condition, boy or girl, without licence from the King, or from the Council of State, which he will not get obtained. . . . If your Majesty's letter be addressed to the child herself, her tutor will know that it hath been done so to save him from danger, and will be the more willing, although but covertly, to send her to your Majesty, and by means of others to dispose for her voyage." And so it was arranged. The Queen could not write outside the kingdom, unless the King sanctioned it, but the King was more than willing—he had heard of the burning of Frendraught, and said he would write himself, which he did. When Blakhal had the King's letter given to him, he reasoned thus: "The King seemeth to me more like a dead man than a living; what if he should die before that I should get the child out of the country?" In that case the letter would be no good to him; and the King was the colour of lead! So he applied to the Queen again, and wheedled a letter out of her also. "In asking her Majesty's letter, I behoved to pretend honour, but assurance was my true motive." All this was not done without the intervention of officials, and Blakhal offered them money, but every one refused it. "We do not take money from the Scots," they said.

Blakhal knew well that if the girl was to be brought out of Scotland it lay with him to do it—no one else would stir a finger,—and he knew the penalty. "My heart was never so base, nor by the grace of God shall ever be, as to save

my life with the loss of my honour." If caught his life was forfeit. The Abbé Chambers tried to dissuade him, and failing in that obtained for him thirty pistoles from the King's treasury. He pawned his soutane for another four. In all he got together fifty pistoles, and thought himself not ill-provided, though a fifth of the sum went in the purchase of a new suit and hat, and a pair of boots. He hired a horse, "the most lazy jade that ever any man crossed." Behind his saddle a great bag held his new clothes, and at the tor were four pistols. A "very wide musketoon," charged with nine balls, hung from his neck, and a sword was by his side. Only for his horse, he would have had no fear of robbers: to lose his money was to lose his journey, and "the way was all covered with them." Four horsemen of evil intent, after a scrutiny, passed him by. A gentleman of Rouen, who overtook him, only escaped from them by the swiftness of his horse, which received a bullet in the neck. As he went down the hill towards Fleurie he was joined by an honest old peasant on foot. At the village a strong young fellow came out of a tavern and said that it was very dangerous to go through the wood alone, that his master was inside drinking with another gentleman, and they would convoy him if he would wait a little. Blakhal, suspecting them to be robbers, replied that he feared no man, either in the wood or out of it, and went on. The fellow followed, and when they were in the wood quickened his steps to come up close, whereupon Blakhal unslung his piece and ordered him to stop: "If you advance but one foot I shall discharge my musketoon in thy belly." At this the peasant exclaimed, "God be blessed, sir! If you had suffered him to come near you, he would have gotten hold of your clothes and pulled you down from your horse and stabbed you. You have saved your own life and mine; for how soon he had killed you, he would have killed me also, for fear that I might discover him hereafter." Blakhal knew the dodge. These robbers were valets one day and masters the other, turn about, to be the less suspect, passing for gentlemen of quality.

It was as difficult for him to get into Scotland as out of it. The Scots army in England suffered no man to pass unsearched "very narrowly." England itself "was all in combustion." At Dieppe he was forced to stay eight weeks and let four ships sail without him, three to Aberdeen and one to Dundee. There were passengers in each who knew him. He shipped at last for Leith, and even then was under suspicion. Two captains on board discussed him, saying, "This man"—Ross, he was called in the ship—"must be some priest or Jesuit, for he is a North country man, and has not gone in these ships. Certainly he does it,

because he dare not take land where he is known."[1] But before long there was something else to think about. Off Holy Island they escaped shipwreck as by a miracle. Skipper and sailors alike, paralysed with fear, were lying face downwards on the deck, and the ship, untended, with no one at the helm, was expected to strike at any moment. Blakhal, as the others, had no hope. He describes the strange manner in which they were saved. "In the meantime that we all of us, despairing life, were preparing ourselves the best way that we could for death, our ship was still advancing along the side of the land, which we might have touched with the shot of a pistol, as if she had been led by a rope, the space of two miles, with all her sails up, and full of side wind, until she came to the port of Holy Island, which has a very difficult and narrow entry, betwixt two very little hills; and when she was just against the port, the water, which was rising in the mouth of it higher than the hills at the two sides, did open itself and stand as a wall on every side of us, until our ship, turning her head where her broadside was, did enter in the port, and, how soon we were entered in, did close again as it was, and raged so cruelly that a ship of Yarmouth, following us within a musket-shot, could not enter the port, but did cast anchor the matter of two hundred paces from it, where she was broken upon the night, and no man saved."

Blakhal left the ship at Holy Island, and looked up two aunts of the young lady on the Scottish border. They were both catholics, but she was with the Countess of Haddington, "a precise puritan" much opposed to his design. Then he went on to Edinburgh. There he saw the girl herself. Another catholic aunt, the Marchioness of Douglas, put him in a secret chamber and sent for her. She was willing to go to France, but only with the consent of her tutor, the Marquis of Huntly.

This necessitated a journey to the North, and at the outset he was in an impasse. He entered Leith on a Saturday as the clocks struck twelve, and to his dismay learned that the ministers had forbidden all work from Saturday at noon until Monday. No one dared ferry him across the Firth of Forth. Nor could he return to Edinburgh, as the Sunday was a day of general communion and the inns were searched for absentees from church. He rode by the water-side to Queensferry. The same prohi-

[1] The General Assembly of 24th April 1582 enacted: "That in time coming all masters and owners of ships arriving within whatsoever port of this realm, strangers and passengers, shall, immediately after their arrival, present their names to the Magistrate and Session of the Kirk of the towns and ports where they arrive, to the effect that the knowledge may be had if they have inbrought any Papists."

bition was in force there, and he had no alternative but to make for the bridge at Stirling, staying the night at Bo'ness. The landlord, who would have been fined for harbouring any one not at church, broached the subject at supper, but Blakhal with his usual ingenuity wriggled out of it. He explained that he was on his way home to Fife, and would communicate at Stirling. Fearing to be entrapped "as ordinarily men are who feign themselves to be of a country whereof they are not," he paid his reckoning, went to bed, and left at break of day.

On approaching Stirling he was in a greater fix. There was no way round that he could see, and he dared not go through the town. No unknown man was allowed to pass without being brought before the Governor, and the mother of the Governor, the Countess of Mar, was Lady Aboyne's sister, a pervert, as he puts it. She "hated priests above all things," and knew of his purpose to carry her niece into France. If he were searched and the letters of the King and Queen of France found upon him, his fate was sure. The only persons in sight were two gentlewomen. He made up on them, and they believed a specious tale he told. It was not a happy effort, but served. The town gate was shut and they entered by the wicket, Blakhal leading his horse. About twenty paces beyond was a door into the garden of an imposing house, and once he was through this the ladies bolted it behind him. He was taken down an alley, at the end of which a stone stair descended by the side of the town wall, little more than one foot broad and very steep. The wall was on one hand and nothing on the other. The horse at first would not face the steps, but one of the ladies took the bridle, and Blakhal, pushing behind, ran it down. They showed him the way, and disappeared up the stairs again. There was nobody about. All the people were at the preaching he thought, but did not inquire, so anxious was he to get away.

It soon got known that he was in Scotland, and plans were laid to catch him in Buchan, where he lay concealed. Two zealous lairds rode with their men to take him "living or dead." He could only see the Marquis of Huntly in secret, in his garden, and not always then. Huntly had his own safety to consider, and was not minded to run risks for the sake of his niece.[1] After much hesitation he consented to let her go to France provided he obtained the King's permission, not otherwise. It looks like a prevarication. His son, the Earl of Aboyne, was with the King, and Blakhal was to go to him. That he would be hanged for his pains was certain. The King himself was

[1] He was executed at Edinburgh in 1649.

between the devil and the deep sea. "The carriage of a letter from his lordship, who was for the King in Scotland, to his son with the King in England, would be a sufficient cause to the rebels to hang me up at the first post that I came to near the Borders." Huntly was firm, and Blakhal accepted the commission, but the son arrived home unexpectedly. In the end it was settled that Blakhal, if taken, would swear he had persuaded the girl to go with him without the consent of anyone. They said as he would be hanged consent or no consent, it did not wrong him in any way. He did not cavil at that. All along he knew the risk would be his.

The next step was to get the girl Henriette out of the hands of the Countess of Haddington. She had to be brought north, as they would not be suffered to embark at Leith or any other port in the south. Huntly after more demur sent his man John Gordon, "John of Berwick," for her, and Blakhal joined him, travelling "as comrades upon the way, and as strangers in the inns." If Blakhal had not been with him, the pusillanimous Gordon would have turned back when within half a mile of his destination. Between Leith and Edinburgh they met the King's bedchamber man, who told them that the Earl of Aboyne, for having been with the King in England, was proclaimed rebel by the covenanters, and his arms torn in pieces at the Market Cross. Gordon had been with Lord Aboyne, and was panic-stricken. Blakhal had much ado to get him to go on. "If I be known in Edinburgh," said Gordon, "I will be cast in prison." Blakhal rejoined, "And so will I, if I be known, and yet I will not turn back." They separated on entering the town. Blakhal told Gordon where he was to be found, but Gordon fearing to be discovered if seen with him, kept his lodging a secret. The Countess of Haddington handed over the girl to her aunt, Lady Barnes, at the Nether Bow, and Blakhal was sent for. Lady Barnes was in a quandary. The girl seemed to be unwilling. To Blakhal there was not a doubt of it, and it was only by pretending that he was taking her to Lady Mar at Stirling that he got her away. Here zeal outran discretion. There was a scene when the deception was discovered. She long persevered in her resolution to go to Stirling or back to Edinburgh, and he rode behind a whole quarter of a mile that she could not appeal to him. For once Blakhal shows something like the white feather: his conscience was troubling him. He got his way, and later she took hers.

The Magistrates of Aberdeen feared the Marquis of Huntly, and dared not openly hinder the embarkation of Henriette Gordon, but knowing that she would not sail without Blakhal, they were the more determined that he should not escape.

They were said to have given orders to kill rather than take him. No one could make trouble over the death of a proscribed priest. He was in Aberdeen, though never two nights in the same place, and always in protestant houses as less likely to be searched. The ship was ready for sea, waiting a favouring wind, and failing to discover him they sent to the Lords of the Green Table at Edinburgh for a warrant to arrest the ship. A warrant was issued not only to arrest the ship, but the priest and the young lady as well, who were to be sent to Edinburgh under a strong guard. They also ordered four men-of-war off Scarborough to take them out of the ship, if it had sailed. The warrant arrived a day late. Between nine and ten the previous night Henriette left for the river mouth, where the ship lay, escorted by a goodly company of landed gentry in the Huntly interest. Fifteen or sixteen armed Town Guards followed, these, of course, to arrest Blakhal. She, noticing them, sent her woman with a warning, and finding he was not with the others, they turned when half-way, thinking to intercept him. While they were marching back, he dropped down by water in the dark, picked up the others in his boat, and rowed out to the ship!

When they arrived at Dieppe the indignation of the Skipper of the ship was intense that "Lieutenant Hay upon the sea, and Father Blakhal upon the land was but all one thing." If he had known, he said, he would have delivered him into the hands of the Vice-Admiral in the Downs. The parliament ships of war blockading Scarborough missed them by the merest chance. As they came up, a fly-boat slipped out, driving swiftly before the wind, and the four ships gave chase, shooting at her as they went. Soon all were out of sight, and in the confusion they passed unmolested. Two days before, these ships had overhauled a vessel from Leith and searched her narrowly for "a young lady and a priest, who should convoy her to the Queen of France; but we shall make them see the Tower of London before they see the Louvre."

Anne of Austria was now Regent of France, the King having died while Blakhal was in Scotland. When Henriette Gordon was presented at court, she arranged for the girl to go to a monastery until she could speak French, as the Maids of Honour would jibe at her want of language, "and she appears to be one who will not suffer it patiently." This was shrewdly perceived. The Queen also settled upon her a pension of one thousand francs, and personally saw to her quarters. Blakhal went to Normandy as preceptor to a boy. He could not again set foot in Scotland, where "his process was made with all the formalities."

Blakhal was well content to lay down his charge. "Would

God," he says, "I had never taken it up again." He had hardly an option. At the end of two years he was sent for. Things were not going well. His protégée had made herself thoroughly disliked, and was unwilling to abide by the consequences. It was Henriette who sent for him, nobody else cared enough, and, as no one would have anything more to do with her, he was compelled to go to the Queen. She spoke her mind freely to him: "I did put her where she was well treated, and might have been well yet, until the occasion had offered that I might have taken her, but she would not remain there. Then I put her with Madame de Brienne to be tried if she were capable to be at court, who could not endure her pride and vanity, a sufficient proof that she would not well agree with her own equals of both age and quality, since she had not complaisance for so virtuous and grave a lady above herself. And now I cannot take her to the court, for the number of maids is complete, which I cannot augment, neither can I put any away to take her. Wherefore if she hath suffered, or do suffer hereafter, she cannot blame anybody but her own self. Therefore let her learn prudence to govern herself, and I shall not be defective on my part. In the meantime, I will that you know that when I received her from your hand, I did not discharge you of the care of her person. I did indeed charge myself with her pension, and shall make it be duly paid; but I left the government of her unto you. Therefore take her out or leave her there, or put her either in monastery or private house, as you will judge fitting. It is all one to me where she be so that she be in good company; for I leave the charge of her unto you." He would have done better had he left her at the Nether Bow in Edinburgh. It was with the utmost difficulty he placed her, first at one and then at another monastery in the Faubourg St Germain.

She was there in January 1649 when the first of the wars of Paris broke out. The child King was conveyed secretly to St Germains en Lay, and the Parisians barricaded the streets. Blakhal was at his wits' end to know what to do with Mademoiselle Gordon, and it says much for Ann of Austria that in the midst of her own trials she remembered this girl, and sent a carriage with two esquires to bring her to St Germains. What happened next reads like a chapter in 'Twenty Years After.' The King's writ did not run in Paris, and a royal carriage was an object of suspicion. No one was now allowed out or in without good passports, which were difficult to obtain. The Lord of Aubeny, a cousin of sorts, got a pass from the Parliament for two ladies, as one of the Queen's *femmes de chambre* was also to be brought. This pass, which was imperfect, nearly cost them

their lives. It was for two gentlewomen unnamed, and a third was in the carriage, a lady of Normandy, known to one of the esquires. The captain of the guard was not satisfied. He thought they might be persons who dared not declare themselves, and a cry was raised that they were the nieces of the hated Mazarin. The people surged madly round the carriage, and threatened to pull it to pieces and kill every one in it. For their own safety the captain was obliged to turn it back with a guard, and the mob, in the belief that they were being taken to prison, let them pass.

By this ill-wind of civil dissension Henriette Gordon gained a footing at court, and the end of Blakhal's third and last adventure was in sight. The Queen had no place for her, and proposed that she should go to the Princess of Condé, but this she refused to do. She had come to France to wait on her Majesty, and her people would be displeased if she condescended to less. To oblige the Queen, the Princess took her as a friend until such time as she could take her to herself. When the Prince of Condé was imprisoned, the Princess sent her packing. Madame de Brienne would not receive her, and sent her to Aubeny, who sent her back to Madame de Brienne. Madame de Brienne would not let her come into the house, but asked Madame de Feran, a counsellor's lady, to deliver her to Madame de la Flotte in the Palais Royal. Madame de la Flotte had not a bed to give her, and sent her once more to Madame de Brienne, "who had both beds and chambers of reserve." That inflexible lady would not let the gate be opened to her, and Madame de Feran had to take her for the night. Nor was that all. One of the Princess of Condé's *femmes de chambre* retained her linen until she was paid twelve gold pistoles and a half for a just debt. This debt Blakhal discharged, borrowing the money from Mr Leith, the Superior of the Scots College. The Queen had to bow to the inevitable, and keep her at court, first as a supernumerary, and then as Maid of Honour. When Blakhal wrote she was dame d'atours to Madame, wife of Monsieur the King's brother.

Once established at court, Mademoiselle Gordon gave Blakhal short shrift. She did not follow his counsel, and jeered at his good advice; and soon she would not see him. He heard her say that she was obliged to none, either in France or in Scotland, but only to the Queen-Mother and to Monsieur. For this affront she was to see herself as he saw her. In his "Epistle dedicatorie" to the "Breiffe Narration" he says: "Thinking with myself to whom I could most conveniently offer this small labour, I did not find any now living who can pretend to so great right unto it as your own self. First, because the greatest and most

difficult actions mentioned in it do regard you, and were taken for your profit, both spiritual and temporal. Secondly, because you seem not to know that ever I did you any services at all, or to undervalue them very much. Wherefore, Madame, I humbly entreat you to bestow two or three hours of the time that you would spend in your recreation, upon the reading of this narrative, which, if you read it with attention, will discover unto you some considerable things, upon which you have assuredly made but very little or no reflection at all." Janet Williamson, her nurse, had said to him before they left Scotland, "Father, you have done for this child (if I can call her a child now of fourteen years old) more than ever any priest did for a child before you, or will do after you, whereby you will win your own soul, and that will be all your reward. For you need not expect from her so much as thankfulness, although she should come to be the most powerful woman in the whole world. For she is not sensible of any good that can be done to her, and will neither love nor respect you, nor follow your advice; and her ingratitude will be your greatest cross that ever you shall find. Experience will teach you the truth hereof." It did.

MY FELLOW-COUNTRYMEN.

BY AN IRISHMAN.

"WE'RE a mighty peculiar people—glory be to God!" So I once heard an Irishman summarise his fellow-countrymen, and the remark stuck in my mind as the only general statement I had ever listened to about them that was absolutely accurate, both in content and atmosphere. Of all other verdicts, including my own, the best I can say is that parts of them are partially just. The more plausible they seem the more they are likely to be wrong, while even the improbability of a paradox will not necessarily make it true. The tradition of the stage stereotypes the Irishman as romantic, sentimental, humorous, alcoholic, and foolish; Bernard Shaw presents him as realistic, sober, and astute; Thackeray thought that all Irishmen belonged to an unofficial Mutual Advertisement Society; while Dr Johnson pronounced them to be a fair-minded people because they never spoke well of one another. There is evidence for and against all these propositions, but I am myself too much Irish to be misled by mere evidence, of which our national view is that "if oral it is probably perjured, and if written it is probably forged" (as Lord Darling said in another connection), but that we must not be prejudiced against a case merely because the only evidence in its favour has been fabricated by the police. I have lived fifty years in the country, and long enough out of it to get some standard of comparison; and all I am sure of about it is that I shall never be able to anticipate its next move, but when that next move has been made I shall see at once that it was inevitable. In Ireland, all facts are doubtful and all inferences are open to question. Let me give an example.

For over a quarter of a century I had to pass every week through one of the oldest parts of Dublin. On one side of the laneway that formed my short-cut lay half an acre of waste-land, on which a cluster of middle-class houses had stood "since Adam was a boy," as the vernacular put it, or in more definite terms since the early eighteenth century, until an opportune fire swept them away in the third quarter of the nineteenth. Some traces of former conditions still remained: here, a broken wall, the bricks pale yellow and crumbling, the mortar dropping away in ragged lumps; there, half the gable end of a house, the chimney almost intact, but the fireplace a blackened hole, the depository of

obscene horrors. Not a blade of grass appeared above the surface of the earth; it was trodden hard by the bare feet of children for whom it was the only available playground, and it was covered with a sediment of tin cans, scraps of paper, broken crockery, and bits of ironware rusted out of all recognition. Its hollows were filled with stagnant water, its hills composed of cinders, vegetable refuse, and worse, amongst which a grimy goat could usually be seen nosing in search of interest and refreshment. Facing this desolation stood a row of two-storied houses, built about the same time as those that had gone. They leaned drunkenly askew, they bulged out over the pavement, cracks ran up their sides from doorstep to roof, and the soot-laden plaster rotted away in scabs from the front like a monstrous skin disease. The mouldering doors gaped on their hinges, the windows were grimed thick with the dirt of generations, the sashes were coming away from the glass, and the glass itself was cracked where it was not altogether broken. The only attempt at decoration was the family washing, stuck out on poles from the upper storeys. Some tenants, less hardy than their neighbours, had stuffed the larger holes with rags or brown paper; but, in general, decay was allowed to run its course without protest or remedy. In any ordinary civilised town the houses would have been condemned and destroyed long before. Perhaps they have been by this time, for I have not visited the spot since the Irish Free State set up business on its own account; but in Dublin, at the end of last century or the beginning of this, no civic matter was urgent which a publican or a slum owner could induce a friend in the Corporation to postpone. Nor, I must add in fairness, was it easy to persuade the occupants of such places to leave them. I myself have seen two families united in screaming protests against their forcible removal when the adjoining tenement had dissolved into its constituent debris the day before, and their own followed suit the day after. Repairs of any kind are, of course, obviously useless when the main fabric is on the brink of collapse. So Murphy's Alley (the name will serve as well as its own) hung together from year to year in the sure and certain hope that so long as it stood it would harbour tenants, and so long as there were tenants a profitable rent could be extracted.

To this spot I was once accompanied by a Colonial visitor of strong views and a forceful personality, nourished on the uplift pages of his favourite magazine. The day was not happily chosen for comfort, but it was appropriate enough to Murphy's Alley. It was raining, and had been raining venomously all night; and on the open

waste, tributary streams from the higher-lying pools had connected them with their lower brethren, already swollen by the direct gift from the heavens, until small rivers were pouring into the street, and the heaps of garbage stood up as islands in a lashed and muddy sea. Water burst from gorged gutters in the roofs and raced down the walls into the cracks, or vomited itself impartially on the pavement, and a fog of leaping raindrops hung six inches above the battered cobble-stones.

My friend, with cascades streaming from his umbrella, halted to memorise the scene, and used it to drive home some moral lessons which he had already made abundantly clear to me: that people who lived (if you could call it living) under such conditions must be (*a*) miserable, and (*b*) immoral —he used the last word in its more limited sexual sense.

I did not contest either point. I felt that (*a*) was true of myself at the moment at any rate, and I wanted to get out of the wet. Besides, he was one of those strong silent men who talk a great deal and are not amenable to argument. So I thought of Ernest Renan's mother, and agreed that he had reason a thousand times, and we went whither we were bound.

Undoubtedly the stage was set for deeds of darkness and sin; but as Shakespeare has taught us, it is possible to play the clown acceptably in a graveyard, and an Irishman's sunshine is not always dependent upon the state of the sky. I knew the place and its inhabitants rather longer, if not better, than my friend did, and my impression was that, compared with a similar number of middle-class English living in a hygienic suburb, they were remarkably cheerful, and their standard of female virtue was high. Not long before, a Rolls-Royce car, driven by an Exalted Past Master of the Noble Order of Chauffeurs, had moved majestically over those very cobble-stones, and pulled up opposite a house in no way distinguishable, as to dirt and dilapidation, from its neighbours. Out of the coupé emerged a Vision in furs, jewels, silk stockings and French shoes, an incredible display of prosperity against the drab background, and picked its way daintily through the mud to the open door through which it disappeared.

"Hallo!" said I to one of my friends who was leaning, as was his manner of an afternoon, against the next corner and philosophising on life from the point of view of a man to whom thirty shillings a week and two bottles of Guinness daily left the Hereafter practically no object. "What's up now?"

"Don't yiz know who that is?" he asked, as one astontonished at local ignorance of a celebrity. I didn't: some philanthropic countess from the Viceregal Court, I hazarded.

"Countess me neck!" he returned—a Dublin idiom indicating disbelief and contempt. "That's Molly O'Hanlon. She used to live down here before she was ruined."

Observe the *mot juste*: the harlot might be imperious without offence in Bond Street, but in Murphy's Alley she found her level: she was ruined amidst riches.

I have seen the same attitude of mind reaching expression over and over again in Dublin theatres. In the Theatre Royal, or the Gaiety, which were patronised by those who esteemed themselves to be somebodies, the daring comedian would hear his most succulent jest receiving as appreciative a titter as he could expect in Leicester Square; but woe betide him if he ventured on an indelicacy in the Tivoli or the Empire (now the Olympia) before an audience ranging from clerks to coal heavers. I have heard a well-known woman singer hissed to silence at the Tivoli for a song which she had given with applause in most of the cities of Great Britain; and when the first imitator of Miss Maud Allan appeared at the Empire she was received with an intake of the breath which I knew meant hostility. "Go back an' put some clo'es on ye, ma'am!" was the opening gun fired from the gallery. "An' take a bar of soap wid yiz!" followed from the opposite corner before the first shot had gone well home. It was unkind, but perhaps not unmerited. Dublin had not then been educated by the increasing purpose of Revue up to Mr George Moore's inextinguishable rapture in the naked human leg; and it certainly did seem, as the famous Blonde's lady friend put it: "She couldn't have got her knees as dirty as that in just eighteen years." The final comment ("That's not dancin'. That's callisthenics"), which came from a bored Army instructor, fell as an anti-climax after the first surprise.

It is this quality of sheer unexpectedness that gives Ireland its charm: it shines before the world in all the glamour of lunacy. Where else could you find, as the late William O'Brien put upon record, a Physical Force party having to be protected by the police from the ferocity of the pacifists? Every day, somewhere within its borders, men are doing mad things out of kindliness or spite, for an ideal or a joke, through the malice of a fiend or the impishness of a child, to earn Heaven or win a sixpenny laugh from the gallery, or possibly most often of all for the stark fascinating insanity of the thing itself. As a nation they seek a despot to lead them to the desired haven of a Republic; as individuals they are constantly ready to shed blood for causes at which they habitually jeer. No one asks why; the madness of an idea is its own sufficient recommendation:

"Enough its simple loveliness for them." A specimen of the class Group Insanity, sub-class Quixotic, occurs to me as I write.

At the time after the war when the Government in public was announcing that it held murder by the throat, and in private was shaking hands with the more prominent assassins; when the policy of alternate internment and release was considered most suitable to conciliate a paradoxical people; the word went forth that certain persons in Wexford were to be put in jail. A detachment of soldiers was sent down forthwith to the village where they lived to effect their arrest; but when the round-up was finished it was discovered that the simple-minded peasantry had wrecked the railway line to Dublin, with that intelligent thoroughness which Irishmen put into a piece of mischief, and the captives could not be taken away until it was repaired. This was a matter of some hours, and, in the meantime, there was nothing to be done but wait; all parties, therefore, naturally returned from the wind-swept railway station to the cheerfulness and warmth of the local public-house. Tommy is a sociable soul, and having acquired refreshment for himself he desires to share it with his companions; so the soldiers stood drinks to the civilians, and the civilians, not to be outdone in hospitality, stood drinks to the soldiers. The feeling of every one present seemed to be in line with Mr Micawber's, that any genial warmth exhibited should not be frozen by him; and song succeeded story until both merged in an impromptu dance, which ended only when the news came that a temporary repair had been made, and the train was ready to start.

Here a difficulty arose. The whisky was potent and the soldiers were young; few of them were now capable of making their own way to the station, much less of controlling other people thither. The civilians, however, although adequately drunk, were still able to walk, and even to lend a hand to friends in need; and it was out of the question to allow anything to happen which might mar the hilarity of the occasion. ("How could we let the poor young divvels get into thrubble for losin' their pris'ners?") So the captives helped their captors to the railway, fell with them fraternally and enthusiastically into the waiting carriages, and arrived in due course at Westland Row Station in Dublin, where they were all put indiscriminately under arrest by the indignant authorities.

Now for an example of the Unexpected—Class B. (Individual). The late Judge Morris once stated a rule of contracts in Ireland: "Speakin' in general, an Irishman 'll keep any bargain that the law and the police compel him to," and this ruling was referred to with approval in official circles,

when we first heard of the Two Just Men of County Meath. Somehow or other, two tenant farmers had managed, without signing any agreement, to obtain advances of money from a public Department for the improvement of their holdings; and as there was nothing on record to show their indebtedness, several years were allowed to slip by before any one thought of asking for the usual instalments on the loan. When the mistake was discovered it seemed hopeless to try to correct it, and the Secretary of the Department wrote to the Treasury explaining the error, and suggesting that the amount should be written off as a bad debt. "By no means," answered the pundit at the Treasury. "Let the borrowers be asked to pay. Doubtless they are honest men who will not repudiate a just charge, even though there is no evidence of the transaction or legal means of enforcing it." Such at least was the effect of the communication, when freed to some extent from the pontifical phraseology in which My Lords of the Treasury express their intentions through the pens of the clever young men from Oxford who endow their gabbling purposes with words. The letter caused much joy throughout the Irish official world; it was considered typical of Treasury mentality to expect two Irish farmers, not proved to be insane, to pay money to a public office when they could not even be threatened with a writ. Still, just to humour Whitehall, and with some amused speculation over the replies that were likely to be received, the two demands were prepared and issued; and by return of post came back not only the current instalments, but the arrears from the beginning.

Now, I ask you. . . .

To a former District Inspector of Constabulary in the West of Ireland I am indebted for a specimen of the unexpected solution of a practical difficulty. For many years Jem Doolan had sustained, with some occasional abuse, the grand old title of "habitual drunk and disorderly" in Moryaveena. On the second Wednesday of every month he appeared before the local magistrate, and was fined five shillings, coupled with a severe reprimand and a warning as to what would happen if he erred in the same way again; and having paid his fine, he would return to the bosom of his family and start again putting penny upon penny until he had amassed the just sum necessary for his next appearance in the following month. On one occasion, however, this decent ritual was interrupted. The sitting magistrate was in both a hurry and a bad temper, and he told Jem he was incorrigible (which was true), and that as previous warnings had produced no effect upon him, he would now be fined ten shillings or go to jail for a fortnight (which was a *non-*

sequitur). Jem, aghast at the sudden change in the tariff, ran over some of the excuses customary and proper at such crises, but his simple eloquence was loud in vain. The magistrate had a day's fishing to attend to, and telling Jem, "We've had enough of yer play-actin,' so we have; a fortnight in jail 'll do ye a power of wholesome," he rose from the Bench and walked down the Court. Jem ran after him, and seizing him by his coat-tails, begged his Honour to go so far, anyhow, as to give him time to raise the money. "Isn't it all the time in the wurruld I'm givin' ye?" retorted his Honour, rightly and indignantly struggling to be free. "Leggo o' me coat, I'm tellin' ye'." But Jem still hung on, and his Honour's rage found vent in a powerful short-arm jab, which concluded the whole matter by stretching his man full length on the floor.

Undeniably it went well with the audience; there was an instant hush such as greets the supreme effort of the virtuoso, but some of those present, including the District Inspector and the slightly abashed and repentant magistrate, felt that laudable and even brilliant as the coup might be in itself, it was possibly a trifle stronger than the circumstances warranted.

Then the Head Constable plunged into the arena. Picking up Jem in his entirely capable arms, he shook him like a carpet, rushed him to the door, and despatched him down the steps with a valedictory kick. "I'll have ye in jail if I catch ye round here again," he thundered. "I'll larn ye to be hittin' the magisthrate!"

The tension relaxed. The magistrate, accepting peace with honour, strolled out, and the congregation dispersed with a new story to tell, while the District Inspector went over to thank the Head Constable for his impromptu display of presence of mind and tact. "I'm very much obliged to you," he said. "You got me out of a very awkward corner. Some one would have been sure to talk, and I'd have had to take some sort of official notice of it."

"Don't mintion it, sorr," said the Head Constable. "I've been twenty years in the foorce, and I've always found the quietest way was the best in the ind."

Truly, it was in this way that in the old days the Royal Irish Constabulary governed the country, and on the whole they did it justly, humorously, and wisely, without too much insistence on the letter of the law, or too rigid an observance of minor regulations, when no great injury was likely to result from their breach. Constables and Sergeants alike have politely stepped off the footpath into the mire to allow me to cycle past without inconvenience; and I was always rewarded with a pleasant: "Thank ye, sorr—it's soft weather we're havin'," when I

reciprocated the compliment to policemen themselves on the forbidden ground. This is the sort of Government that Irishmen really understand and enjoy: an easy go-as-you-please rule under which, when you were in minor difficulties with Authority, you went to somebody who knew Somebody, and the matter was adjusted to the satisfaction of all concerned. The R.I.C. saw that the proper persons were put into jail at the proper time, and that respectable citizens could go about their business or their pleasure undisturbed—even at election times and wakes if, as Mr Robey expresses it, they "tempered their hilarity with a modicum of restraint." In short, the Constabulary believed with a difference in what we are told was the code of Tammany: "punish a man for what he is, not for what he does." The Sinn Feiners brought that era to a close with another paradox, for under their régime the respectable classes were most likely to furnish a murderer, and the ordinary petty criminals became, by contrast, law-abiding. "What do the polis mean by shuttin' down Baldoyle Races?" asked an indignant sportsman during this period. "Sure, the fellas that do be puttin' their bit on a horse don't want to be killin' anybody, barrin' an odd bookie or two. It's the Nashnal Lib'rery they ought to be watchin', for it's full of long-haired poets that'd stick a knife in ye soon as look at ye, if they thought ye knew less Irish than they did—or more, for the matther o' that." There was icy truth beneath the fun of a playlet I saw a couple of years ago at the Olympia Theatre in Dublin, in which Mr "Jimmy" O'Dea delightfully represented a red-hot revolutionary, eager to use his gun in support of the Republic, who, on the arrival of the "Black and Tans," discovered that he was "more in the litthery end of the movement." The change in the established order of things at first bewildered even some of the faithful. "Do these insthructions about attackin' barracks an' shootin' policemen come from Headquarthers?" demanded a zealous but unenlightened Sinn Feiner. "Becos if they're not official it's murdther, an' if they are, why aren't we shootin' somebody hereabouts?"

Not all the rulers that were sent to us by Great Britain appreciated the value of a little judicious inconsequence as did the Royal Irish Constabulary. John Morley (as he was when he reigned over us) intended honestly, I believe—so far as a politician can have any honest intentions,—to do his best for Ireland according to his lights. His political creed made him politically popular, and for all I know he may have been welcomed as a mad wag in his own social circles, but he was not personally liked as Mr Balfour was liked by people who hated his politics. If one may judge by Morley's

books he felt, like many conscientious agnostics, that he must testify to his creed by being a little more respectable than the orthodox; and the passion for propriety becoming more baleful than alcohol, he upheld righteousness so heavily, and made decency so formidable, that his Irish audiences had no difficulty in realising how much, how very much, could be said for wine, women, and song.

General Nevil Macready was an instance outside of politics. "Mac reasons awfully straight," grumbled one of his subordinates, finding a defect in what the General, no doubt rightly, regarded as a virtue; and I cannot but think that a little more indirectness of mind would have put him in better harmony with his surroundings. Possibly he would not agree; for in his 'Annals of an Active Life' he observes that the Irish have no sense of humour. Wit, of a sort, he might allow them, but humour, no—a thousand times, no. The remark is not to be counted amongst the General's happiest efforts, and it is obviously open to several interpretations; but the least controversial is to regard it as one of those sweeping verdicts already mentioned which must be reversed on appeal, and which yet carry enough truth to be pungently irritating to the persons concerned. No one ever admitted willingly and with candour that either he or his nation had no sense of humour; although we all have dismal knowledge of worthy people who insist on giving us every particular of an anecdote except the point, and when they recover from their merriment bewail the inability of their friends to savour the jest. Lack of humour is, indeed, betrayed more cruelly by what a man thinks laughable than by what he does not. I remember a gentleman, tolerably bemused with liquor, lurching into the Theatre Royal in Dublin during the performance of a Shaw play—probably being under the impression that he had reached the Tivoli Music-hall adjoining. As the piece progressed, he shifted about restlessly in his place, and was clearly labouring under some sense of grievance unknown to his neighbours. At last he could contain himself no longer, and he burst forth in husky indignation to the world at large: "D'ye call this a play? The las' time I was here I saw a fat fella, an' a tall thin fella slappin' him in the stummick wid a walkin' stick—that was a gran' play . . ."

However, I wander from the General's comment. The first thing to be said in its favour is that just as there are many Englishmen and even many Scotsmen who have no sense of humour, so there are many Irishmen to whom a joke is no laughing matter. In Irishmen, moreover, that special sense, even when it is normally acute, is liable to temporary but complete eclipse, particularly when it comes into contact with

political interests. I have repeatedly heard Irishmen jeering with discrimination and gusto at oratorical flights which a few hours before had intoxicated them to the pitch of martyrdom or murder.

Then again we must remember that the General's presence in Ireland synchronised with a hectic period in our national history when a sharp perception of the ludicrous was less often useful than a quick finger on the trigger. For years the Government had been teaching the Irish people, by the simplest practical lessons of the kindergarten, that the shortest way to get what they wanted was over the congenial highroad of assassination. Unkind things would be said about them in Parliament; they would be denounced; they would be told that they had forfeited all claim on England's sympathies; they would be warned that they must not think they could terrorise the British Government; and then the rebuke would be softened by the discovery that something must be done to remedy injustices so great as to provoke a naturally peace-loving race to violence and crime. What both Macbeth and the next Irishman you meet would call "bloody instructions, which, being taught, return to plague the inventor," are just what the Irish are most apt to assimilate; nor were they unmindful of the tactics of the suffragettes who had attained their ends by burning houses, destroying letter-boxes, and throwing brick-bats at Cabinet Ministers. If I may tamper with Mr Chesterton's eulogy of the Salvation Army, I should say that it is always doubtful whether political agitation is right, but any Irishman can see that throwing brick-bats at Cabinet Ministers must be right; so I venture to suggest that the failure of the Sinn Fein party to join in the laugh when the joke was against them may not have been due altogether to native lack of appreciation. They had an instinct that the time could be more profitably employed in shooting the General's officials. The event has proved the soundness of their logic, upon which, however, I have no wish to dwell. Let me return to the gaiety and value of nonsense.

The Irish Bull, our leading article for the export trade, is not what it is sometimes imagined to be, a reckless adventure in the insane: it is usually the offspring of a mixed metaphor, and its characteristic is the clash of two ideas, the words looking one way and the thought another. It is no more peculiar to Ireland than a potato. Within the last six months I had occasion to point out to the literary editor of a pontifical English weekly paper that a review in the current issue had reached a triumphant close with four mixed metaphors in its concluding sentence. So far as my experience went, it was a

record last wicket stand; but I hinted that it might be well to be more economical of such bravura passages in future. He retorted crushingly that the mixture of metaphors—or rather, as he very justly corrected me, the synthesis of senses—was quite deliberate, and that any one who loved Japanese prints would understand what was meant. I was too intimidated by the synthesis of senses and the Japanese prints to say out what was in my mind, and my study of other compositions from the same hand led me to accept without difficulty the author's belief in the virtue of mixed metaphors; but I stammered something to the effect that it was not usually considered a good apology for an Irish Bull that its intention was clear—even to lovers of Japanese prints. To this he replied that I did not know good English when I saw it; and so, in all love, we parted. But I am still unrepentant enough to think that the distinction of an Irish Bull is that its meaning can be divined but cannot be construed: as in the war-time utterance of another English weekly, "We must leave no stone unturned to secure the mastery of the air," or the statesmanlike eulogy pronounced by a still more academic journal over a dead leader, "He always kept a firm grasp of the wider vision." My richest discovery of this sort was in the London Letter of a Belfast newspaper in August 1926: "When the game had reached its lowest ebb, Grimmett and Mailey literally pulled it out of the fire, and demonstrated once more the value of keeping a stiff upper lip." This, I felt, was true eloquence: the figure of pulling the ocean out of the flames with a stiff upper lip is a creation racy of the soil; but the choice of the one apposite word "literally" to give it life has, as Dr Johnson remarks, "a beauty peculiar to itself, and must be numbered amongst those felicities which cannot be produced at will by wit and labour, but must arise unexpectedly in some hour propitious to poetry."

In day-to-day speech such turns of phrase are fairly common, and I still retain a delighted memory of the new recruit to my first office who told us: "The best penny tin-whistle I iver had was a brass one I paid sixpence for." On his arrival in Dublin he saw, for the first time, the type of Georgian house which had a broad flight of stone steps ascending to the front door. "Them are quare houses ye have in this town," was his reaction. "Look at them wans with the ground-floor upstairs!" Once he was seen struggling with a door-knob which turned round futilely in his hand. "The screw in it isn't there," he explained. These are on the plain track of the Irish Bull: let me put down some specimens of the type that achieves a subtlety mere logic could not

give. An accomplished lady, whom I am proud still to number amongst my friends, is proficient at this as at most other modes of expression. "I like Englishmen's humour; it's slow and penetrating. It doesn't scintillate like ours, when nobody knows what we mean," is her contribution to the general topic under discussion. "A. B. knows too much about women to understand them," was her summary of a local philanderer; and I have heard her short-circuit a contentious bore with: "For the sake of argument I agree with you." Her husband's obdurate indifference to the state of his clothes led her once to put me under strict orders to escort him to the nearest hatter and see that he got the proper sort of hat. On our return, it was produced for her inspection and approval. "I'd like it, whether I liked it or not; but I *do* like it," was her glad judgment.

All these sayings have clear meanings, although the sense does not lie upon the surface of the words; but there is also inherent in the exasperating charm of Ireland an inconsequence so complete that it discloses no purport whatsoever; and in the face of this we can but imitate Shakespeare who, as Matthew Arnold assures us, in moments of similar provocation smileth and is still. A well-loved Dublin Civil Servant, whom I shall disguise under the name of Corrigan, was sitting in an almost empty tram, when the occupant of the opposite corner leaned forward and said, with elaborate politeness but slightly maudlin speech: "Shcuse me, sir—am I in thish tram?"

Corrigan assured him that he was, and for a few moments he seemed satisfied; but then some brooding suspicion drove him ("drunk I may be, but always the gen'leman") to a second urbane question—

"Shcuse me, sirr—how do you know I'm on thish tram?"

"Because I saw two of your friends helping you on, and the conductor pushing you into your seat."

That, again, appeared conclusive, and silence followed; but the seed of doubt was still there, and it blossomed in the final unanswerable query: "Shorry for troublin' you, sirr—but d'ye mind tellin' me—how d'ye know I'm me?"

During the war I was equally baffled by an inquiry from County Cork, which reached me in one of the rationing Departments: "When I am not at home and not anywhere else, I cater for myself. What am I to do?" Out of all the golden resources of the English language an Irish colleague, to whom I showed the letter, picked the unique word for apt reply: "Quite!"

Again, when I was trying to live an upright life under the shadow of the Health Insurance Acts, I was once called to see "a Public"—the natural enemy of all Civil Servants—who was in some tangle which

the regular interviewing clerk could not unravel. The clerk explained, in a hurried whisper, that he could not make out what the trouble was, but that the visitor was Irish (which would account for anything), and that I (presumably as hailing from the same asylum) might be able to establish contact. I opened with the usual question from the unpublished Conversational Phrase-book for Pilgrims in Health Insurance: "What was the date of the last stamp on your card?"

"I never had a card stamped."

My mastery of the technique of the business showed me, almost without effort, that this poor man's employer had been neglecting his duty, and I turned, mentally, to the section headed "Non-Compliance," and produced another appropriate question, "Where were you last employed?"

"I was never employed anywhere."

This was a contingency for which the far-sighted constructors of the code had provided, so I said, sympathetically but firmly, "Well, you're not in insurance."

"The divil I'm not! Then what the blazes have yiz been doin' with my money?"

Had I been on my native soil I daresay I might have hit on some unsolicited repartee which would have either silenced our client or led to a free fight, but in the more restrained atmosphere of Great Britain we were taught to follow St Paul's directions ("Giving no offence in anything that the Ministry be not blamed"), and I had to taste the bitterness of defeat. The demand had no relevancy, and yet it was delivered with so much conviction that I felt it appealed, not altogether in vain, to some transcendent justice above the quibbles of logic. "I'd nivir think of such a thing," I heard one Irish servant girl say to another. "Ah, thry—for imaginement's sake!" urged her friend. Whether "for imaginement's sake," or to escape the importunate pressure of reality, most Irishmen can enter at will those Fortunate Isles of the mind where "falls not hail or rain, or any snow, nor ever wind blows loudly"; where all things are relative beyond the dreams of an Einstein; where any pleasant absurdity is coherent and any comforting sophism persuasive. How is it possible for humdrum dwellers in the Actual to rationalise the visions of habitants of that country to attain which "you keep going on and on until you never get there?"

"ADOLPHUS."

For a period of several months in the year 1923 a certain section of the population in one of our newly acquired near Eastern possessions had been inclined to wander from the straight and narrow path of peaceful occupation into the somewhat lucrative and more pleasant occupation of raid and counter-raid. The ringleader, Sheik M——, had refused all requests and commands to report himself to the nearest British post and account to the Government for his actions; and as some of the more recent of these would have taxed the brains of an army corps of lawyers to explain away, Sheik M——, believing himself safe among his wild desolate hills, where no roads to speak of existed, sat down and waited for the next move in the game. It was not long in coming. Sheik M—— had been a thorn in the side of the administration for so many months that leaflets were to be dropped from aeroplanes informing the truculent one that the patience of the Government was not inexhaustible, and, in the event of non-compliance within a specified number of days, the aeroplanes would next time show their sting.

. . . . . .

The temporary landing ground, at the best of times a dismal sort of place, looked even more dismal in the grey light of early dawn. Pilots and mechanics shivered in the keen breeze, and the prospect of hot tea within a few minutes was welcomed by most of the assembly. The conversation was on the work to hand—would the demonstration about to be carried out over the town of Suel, the stronghold of Sheik M——, be effective or otherwise; opinions, freely stated, were interrupted by some one remarking that we were already a minute or two behind our time. A few minutes sufficed to test engines and taxi out into the wind; then, at a signal from the leading machine, engines were opened out, and our four aeroplanes, after a short run, were in the air, climbing steadily in the direction of Suel.

Away in front lay the mountains of the Kara Dagh, and beyond them again still more mountains, until as far away as the eye could reach the horizon was broken by white-topped peaks, their sides all pock-marked with the shadows made by the rising sun. Foreboding desolate country, breeding a race of hardy hillmen, whose allegiance to the Government, even during the long years of the Turkish régime, was somewhat slender. Only once before in their history had the power of the Government been strong. This

was during the years authority rested in the hands of one Nuri, sometimes called "The Blind Pasha." Legend has it that during his time the country was so peaceful and law-abiding that a "virgin with one hundred golden roubles in her head-dress could wander as she wilt, and none would dare harm her." Alas! as our somewhat cynical Medical Officer had put it, "Nowadays she would certainly lose her head-dress."

The exact position of Suel, our objective, was a bit vague to all three of us, as we were new-comers to that particular part of the country, and the maps were far from accurate; but with a bit of luck, and the fact that nearly all the mountain ranges run almost dead north and south, I felt sure I could hit it off fairly well; and besides, if the other machines had gone ahead, one was hardly likely to miss them, the visibility being excellent. About twenty minutes later, Murray, my mechanic, touched me on the shoulder and pointed ahead to where, away down in the valley about seven thousand feet below us, I could see a Bristol fighter lying among a mass of boulders. I gave a whistle of dismay as with engine throttled back we lost height in its direction. The amount of damage to the Bristol fighter could not be ascertained from the air, although we circled over it several times, but it was obvious from a very low altitude that, even if repairs could be effected by its crew, it would take more than their combined strength to move the machine over the boulders to an open space we saw some hundreds of yards away, which would give the necessary run to take off. Now what was I to do? It had been agreed the previous night that twin-engined machines should not carry out rescue work, that a special machine would be detailed for this job; but neither it nor any other machine was in sight, and the occupants of the Bristol would get short shrift from the inhabitants of the valley if some effort was not made to get them away. The machine I was flying, a fourteen-seater troop carrier, if not ideal for the job, could at least take both crashed pilot and observer aboard with ease. I turned various schemes over in my mind, and at last decided to land alone and try to effect a rescue if possible. Having arrived at this decision, the open space close to the crashed Bristol was again inspected; and as it appeared, from the air at least, to be quite firm and free from obstacles, I glided towards it as slowly as possible, but the moment the wheels touched and the machine lurched slightly on her nose, I realised that the ground was not hard and firm but a treacherous bog. My hand flew to the throttle—too late. Lower and lower the wheels sank, and as the machine came to a standstill, embedded to the axle in

mud, I realised to my horror that instead of two people stranded in a hostile country there were now four, and that a practically new fourteen-seater troop carrier, with very little flying hours in its log-book, would soon be a mass of flames once the tribesmen plucked up enough courage to come near it. Leaving Murray with his rifle to guard the machine I ran across the valley, revolver in hand, towards the crashed Bristol.

I looked up and found the sky empty. My two companions had probably returned to Kurk to report the occurrence. Zip! A bullet whistled by and embedded itself in the mud some yards behind me. Umph! The burning of the machine and other distinctly unpleasant events might take place sooner than I thought.

I found the pilot and the observer in a savage mood, cursing their luck in loud and strong language, a temporary stoppage in the petrol system when at a very low altitude being responsible for their forced descent. This part of the valley, being higher up the slope, was dry, and they decided, therefore, to return with me and try to move the bogged machine if possible. I had my doubts, but agreed. We were unanimous that two hours was the most we could expect before, to quote the words of the observer of the Bristol, "a good rough house would surely happen," allowing one hour for the news of our misfortune to reach Sheik M——, whose town, the observer told me, was eight or nine miles away, and another hour for his followers to reach us. Added to this, we discovered from the map that we were only a few miles away from the village where two political officers had been murdered in rather revolting circumstances some time ago, and whose headman, now a fugitive from justice with a price on his head, would only be too glad of the opportunity to capture three British officers and hold them to ransom if nothing worse befell them. With an outlook on life which was not "all sunshine and roses" we reached my machine and got to work. No use: the engines, assisted by much manhandling of the wings, did their best, but we only moved a yard or two and stuck more firmly than ever. At this moment, when things seemed pretty well hopeless and we were discussing the chances of getting through the mountains on foot with our limited rations, Murray gave a shout and pointed up the valley to where, at about fifteen thousand feet, was a flight of six Bristols returning from the direction of Suel. I jumped to the locker containing the ground strips and ran across towards the firm ground, firing Véry lights as I ran. To my joy they turned in our direction, broke formation, and prepared to land near the white strip I had put out. These strips

were carried by all machines, and used to indicate whether ground was fit for landing or not, while, by forming them into certain prearranged letters, a means of communication between air and ground could be established. After emptying a drum or two of Lewis-gun ammunition along the ridge of the hill, from where stray shots had been fired, and placing two machines in a position from where the back guns could be brought to bear on either entrance to the valley, all crews, except the two left on guard, proceeded to try once more to get the bogged machine on to firm ground. Again the engines were run up, and with many curses and much cracking of ribs from under the wings, where many backs were trying to take the weight off the wheels, the attempt had to be again abandoned. By now the sands were running out fast. We had been over two hours in the valley, and the senior officer present decided to give up the attempt. "Home, John," was the order of the day, and I for one turned my steps reluctantly away. It was hard to leave such a valuable machine, but to stay longer was only asking for trouble. The Bristols would now have to take us all off as best they could, even if it meant some one having to lie flat on a wing. Fortunately, as a considerable amount of petrol had already been expended, there was no need for this. The added weight would not matter, and beyond the fact that the extra passengers had to squeeze themselves into the gunners' cockpits, designed for one but now forced to carry two, there was not much else to worry about. All machines but one were at last started up, and while walking down to see if I could help, the most villainous-looking face I have ever seen suddenly rose up behind a boulder in front of me. My hand went to my revolver holster. It was empty, and I realised with dismay that my Webley was, at that moment, lying on the wing of some machine, where, in a moment of forgetfulness, I had left it. No good running. These hillmen can bring down a hawk on the wing with a rifle, so I stood and waited for the bullet or the wild knife rush which, I felt sure, the next few seconds would bring forth. Nothing happened. The face broke into a broad grin as its owner moved round the corner of the boulder and allowed the remainder of his body to come into view, and what a view! Water at this particular season of the year was more than plentiful in the hills, but this gentleman had obviously not made its acquaintance for many months. Sandal shod, his flowing robes or rags were apparently held together by the number of cartridge bandoliers which adorned his body. Of these, he had at least two round each shoulder and the same number round his waist. Into the

latter was thrust, crosswise, the curved knife which even the youth of the country considered a necessary part of their personal adornment. He advanced towards me, touching lip and heart with right hand as he did so. Evidently, I thought, what looked like a man of war had come on an errand of peace. We touched hands, and Adolphus, for as such he was known to us all later, got so excited and talked so quickly that he foamed at the mouth.

"Budmash! Budmash! Go! Go!"

He pointed towards the hills, and so to quieten him down I escorted him by the arm towards the Flight Commander, who was standing by his machine in a hurry to be off. Adolphus greeted him with a broad grin, intermingled with nervous glances at the hills to right and left. That grin! how infectious it was. Somehow it inspired me with the thought that perhaps all was not lost, that we might yet save my machine, for I had an idea, it could hardly be called a plan, and, in Adolphus, it struck me I had a friend: how true a friend he was to prove I did not at that moment realise. Any plan is better than none, so, taking a sheet of paper from the Flight Commander's message pad, I wrote on it to the effect that the bearer would be awarded the sum of 500 rupees, provided he guarded my machine well until my return. This I handed to Adolphus, and, pointing to his rifle, explained the contents of the paper somewhat laboriously in the vernacular. The smile, if possible, got broader; the rifle was brought to the "ready," and an enormous leaden bullet thrust into the breech. I looked at Adolphus and then at the hills on either side of the small valley, where figures were to be seen by now moving on the sky-line. Could he pull it off, I wondered, or, within a few minutes of our departure, would the machine be a burning mass with his dead body to feed the flames? Anyway, it was a chance, and the only one. Five hundred chips was a lot of money to a hillman, and I felt sure that those somewhat massive bandoliers of his would be empty, or nearly so, before he would let any one touch the machine which meant so much money to him. I gave him a cheering wave, which was answered by a grin, as we took off and headed for Kurk.

Three days passed waiting for the weather to moderate and the valley to dry before salvage operations could be carried into effect. Each morning and evening I went out in the back seat of a Bristol fighter to carry out a reconnaissance and see how the machine had fared during the intervening hours. It was always the same, the machine as we had left it, with Adolphus sitting on a petrol tin, his long-barrelled rifle across his knees. He never even bothered to

wave as we flew by, a few feet off the ground. On the fourth day, the weather having improved, six machines started out. Two of these, loaded with bombs, were to patrol up and down the valley, while the remaining four carried pieces of ammunition boxes slung in the bomb racks, in case the ground in the valley might still be a bit on the soft side. Our numbers included a political officer to help us over the language difficulty. Landing with care we were soon hard at work, aided by Adolphus, none the worse for his three days' sojourn in the open. The pieces of ammunition boxes made an excellent path, and, with the engines near boiling point from the heavy work they were called upon to perform, we reached firm ground again, and turned the machine into the wind ready to get off without delay. Adolphus, stripped to the waist and glistening from his exertions, looked wilder than ever, his black hair and beard all bedraggled as he searched in his bandolier for the precious paper. Apparently his work now finished and the labourer being worthy of his hire, he felt he could claim his just reward, but during the somewhat hectic time of the last few days, although Adolphus himself was prominent, the question of the 500 rupees reward had slipped from my mind. I had not one hundredth part of the amount with me, and to obtain it would have to approach the political officer at Kurk on my return; but how then to deliver it to Adolphus was another question altogether. Once away we might not return to this part of the country again for weeks, perhaps never, as flights at that time were continually on the move. Well, "if the mountains could not come to Mahomet, Mahomet must go to the mountains." I looked at Adolphus, and playfully tapped the cushions of the empty seat in the machine beside me. Without a blink of an eyelid he slipped his clothes over his head, and, winding his head-dress more firmly around him, stepped into the machine beside me. Stout fellow! Until a few days ago, apart from those passing overhead far up in the sky, he had never seen an aeroplane. Yet here he was ready to start off in what he stood up in, the question of his return to be left apparently in the hands of Providence. How different, I reflected, was this from my experiences in the past of certain people at home, who should have known better, with their senseless and tiresome questions. "I won't fall out, will I? What will happen if the engine stops?" &c. Perhaps, though, Adolphus was not cursed with that, from which the Irish, in my opinion, seem to suffer most—vivid imagination. When actually in the air his demeanour underwent no change, his dark piercing eyes missing nothing, pointing

out now and then with his long bony fingers to some familiar landmark below. Strange! as most people on their first flight seem to have the greatest difficulty in finding and recognising their own aerodrome after five or six minutes in the air. What a swaggering figure, I thought, Adolphus would cut when once more safe in his native village, 500 chips in his pocket, he told the tale of his adventures, which, if my surmise was correct, would lose nothing in the telling. What a great liar too, for it was a hundred to one that no one in the village would believe him.

Off at last! the machine safe, though why it was not hurt or otherwise destroyed will always be to me the eighth wonder of the world. One hour's flying, I mused, and then safe on Kurk aerodrome, an exciting experience would be over, and despatched to that part of memory's storehouse which is only opened now and then as we gaze into the fire of a winter's evening and live again in the past with other days and other men. Alas! it was not to be; something must have indeed offended my particular joss, for before many minutes were passed a new emergency arose and had to be faced. Expecting the Bristols, who were due to take off as soon as possible after us, would soon be making their appearance, I kept glancing over my shoulder to the sky behind me. During one of these perfunctory glances my eye caught the port engines, and to my horror I noticed water escaping from the vicinity of the water-pump—most probably the gland packing. A rough calculation showed me that we had about forty miles to go and the country of the worst possible nature, broken foothills with no prospect of anywhere to effect a safe landing. I looked again at the engine. Could we do it? No! we were losing water quickly—so quickly that an immediate descent was obviously necessary. Anxiously I searched the country ahead, and, about five miles away, I located the old emergency landing ground at Chem. At least here was a nice level piece of country to land on, but it was, at the same time, something of an unknown quantity, for the village had not been visited by our people for many months, and the temperament of its inhabitants was unknown. Like the majority of the hillmen, it was pretty certain that their sympathies rested with the side whose star was, at that moment, in the ascendant, and in their opinion it could quite easily not have been our star, for the country was more than unsettled. Well, there was nothing else for it but to land, so, furiously angry, I made preparations for descent. It was rotten luck to have had two forced descents in this sort of country within a week. Things had straightened themselves out towards the end

last time, as the presence of Adolphus reminded me. Would my luck hold good once more, I wondered? With great care, for the ground had been somewhat neglected and the grass was long, we landed, and, after a cautious look around, proceeded to repack the water-pump gland, but before we could take off again water, with which to refill the radiator, was essential. Wearily I started towards the bundle of hovels which constituted the village of Chem. The Bristols had by now caught us up, and while one kept circling over the landing ground the remainder proceeded to Kurk to report. Approaching the village I scented something wrong: the streets were apparently deserted by both man and animal, but I knew and could feel that I was under observation from several points. Not very pleasant, but by now my back was up, and besides, water for the engine was urgently needed. There was nothing else for it but to keep on and try to locate the house of the headman. Rounding a corner I suddenly found myself looking down the business ends of two revolvers. D——! I had backed the wrong horse this time. Abruptly I stopped and threw up my arms. The right hand in front of me was slowly lowered and its revolver deposited in holster, while the left and its contents kept me covered. Suddenly my right hand was grabbed and shaken heartily, while the face behind the revolver which kept me covered broke into a roar of laughter. A good joke, but "search me," for at that moment or ever after I could not quite see the point. The voice inquired my mission, and when it was explained in halting tones—halting for other reasons than my inability to speak "the vernacular," gave a shout, and the street was instantly alive with people who tumbled out of the houses so quickly they reminded me afterwards of the "Pied Piper." Food and drink were provided, and the women despatched for the necessary water, after which the whole village proceeded *en masse*—men, women, and children—to inspect the aeroplane, which was only saved from wreckage by the gallant Murray, who scowled so ferociously that he somewhat curbed the excitement. Adolphus was very subdued, and never, even for a moment, moved from my elbow. An anxious look was in his eye, and the smile for once had faded. Perhaps he scented trouble, for it is quite common in this country for those who live in one valley to carry on a lifelong blood feud with the inhabitants of the next; in fact a very audible sigh of relief broke from his lips when we were once more seated in the machine ready to proceed. I thanked the headman for his trouble, and promised to mention it to the political officer at Kurk. He appeared anxious for news, and impressed at the size of the aeroplane.

News I reserved, but explained that aeroplanes of such size were new to the country, and that there were at least a hundred more within striking distance of Chem. Not strictly true, but I wanted to make an impression; for although friendly at present, the demands of Sheik M—— for more followers to his banner were incessant, and the morrow might find my man ready to lend him a willing ear. From the look I received the headman gave me the impression that he considered me either a great man or a great liar, and knowing something of the hillman I was inclined to the latter. No reason was given, in spite of my repeated requests, to account for my reception, and I remain in ignorance of it to this day. A lot of aeroplanes had passed over during the morning and for some days previously, so he may have thought better of any plan he had framed in haste when we had landed. That something was intended I felt sure. An hour later we were off again. Adolphus had his old smile, which grew broader as we throttled back and glided towards Kurk aerodrome. It was a welcome landing, as the strain of the last week was beginning to tell. Promiscuous forced landings in this country could not always be expected to end as happily as mine had done.

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"Is she not a delight to the eye, sahib, and Allah good to me this day."

So spoke Adolphus as, seated on a rug in the horse serai of Kurk town, his admiring and practical eye took in the good points of a fine-looking Arab pony pawing the ground in front of us. I nodded assent. Since eight that morning Adolphus had been my only and illustrious companion. It was now noon, and his spirits as high as ever. Besides, since our arrival at Kurk two days previously most of my waking hours had also been spent in his company. The 500 chips paid, I was anxious to see Adolphus once more back among his "ain folk." The money had gone to his head like strong wine, and trouble, with a capital "T," was looming in the offing. I had been too discreet to inquire if his was a state of single bliss or otherwise, but the way he ogled every young woman who passed him in the street was disgraceful, to say nothing of his rather livid description of a visit to that part of the town where the pretty ladies were always glad to entertain young men of his present financial standing. Left alone, his well-earned reward would have disappeared in a week, and our visit to the horse serai was a move on my part whereby he could purchase the withal to help him homewards that same afternoon. It was an uphill job, but I looked upon his return as a sort of moral responsibility. Each stall in

the small bazaar held for him a thousand wonders, and the insults heaped upon the unfortunate ancestors of stall-holders, who, in his opinion, demanded too much for their goods, were such as to make me thankful that the padre, who was to have accompanied us, had at the last moment been unavoidably detained. In spite of great pressure all day I had refused to accept a present, but Adolphus pleaded so hard I gave in, and accepted from him a villainous knife and a sheath, which are to-day among my most valued possessions. We reached the outskirts of the village at last, and Adolphus prepared for his long three-day ride homeward. He grasped my hand, and for a few seconds the familiar smile faded. It was a hundred to one we would never meet again, and he had done me a great service. He moved away and, mounting his pony, turned its face in the direction of the hills. My thoughts followed him long after he had disappeared round a bend in the road. Truly a lovable figure, I mused, but now set up for life. The larger part of his small fortune was still intact; what would he do with it? Invest it in cattle and wives and settle down most likely, but then you can never tell with a hillman.

. . . . . .

"That bloke that shot up the column in Baz Pass is now in hospital, and keeps asking for the red-headed sahib. You're the only one here with that distinction, so you had better go along."

The P.O. removed his topee and wiped his brow, for the day was warm and the single fly 40 lb. tent, which was my dwelling, was not over cool in the hot morning sun. I explained to the P.O. that although I was known by sight but not by name to a good number of townsmen of Kurk, my fame, I felt assured, had not yet reached as far away as Baz Pass.

"Oh, come on and don't be so bloomin' sarcastic," he replied.

I picked up my topee and meekly followed him to the hospital.

"There he is," said the P.O. a few minutes later, pointing to the third bed from the right in the long cool ward. I looked and then gasped, for there, sitting up in bed, his right arm swathed in bandages, was Adolphus, his grin, somewhat twisted from pain, as large as ever! Remorse for the deed that had placed him there or fear of its consequences—there was none to judge from his welcome.

"All my life, sahib, I have wanted to lead a raid, but never had the opportunity until I left you and returned to my village a rich man.

"Then with my money I bought good rifles, and with eight companions started out in quest of adventure. Three days later we reached Baz Pass, on the way to join my brother

in Rani, and there met many of your people with rifles and guns. We hid, but a desire to prove myself a man came upon me. What better chance than now, I thought? How my name as a great warrior would go round the villages, most assuredly they would call me the 'Lion-Hearted' or the 'Warrior.' Blinded by my eagerness to achieve greatness I urged on my companions, and we attacked your people. That is all, sahib; punish me as you will, but"—he pointed to his arm—"I will always be a great man now, not only in my village but in my valley."

I promised to do what I could for him, the P.O., in whose hands his destiny would lie, being a bit of a friend of mine. At this a sigh of relief escaped his lips, and the old familiar smile I had grown to like so well was on his countenance.

Orders having arrived for my return to England, I took the hand of Adolphus for the last time, and turned on my heel. At the door I turned back.

"I wanted to prove myself a man, sahib," he said.

"Adolphus, to me you always were one," I replied.

OXFORD NIGHT-CAPS.

BY DUM-DUM.

THERE has lately come into my possession a small book with the above name that was published at Oxford nearly a hundred years ago. It is an extremely learned monograph on drinks in favour at the University in its day, and, apart from its general interest, may have a moral of sorts for those who put down recent results of the boat race to a degenerate practice of cocktail drinking. Certainly my grandfather, to whom the book belonged, was not degenerate. As an undergraduate he was of high renown both on the river and in town-and-gown rows. He afterwards distinguished himself as Garibaldi's Englishman—and was roundly abused by part of the home press for gratifying a penchant for murder which was no good to him in England,—and has left a memory still honoured in the Duchy. When called to the Bar, on turning up for the usual celebration, he was confronted by his friends with an enormous vessel containing I don't know how many quarts of some heady fluid, and dared to take it straight off. Did he hesitate? No. Down it went, and on an empty stomach. That is the sort of man that he was. It is queer, or providential, that ages after his library has been disposed of, this unimportant-looking little paper-covered brochure should come into the hands of his unworthy descendant.

The book opens ecclesiastically with Bishop and its variants, Lawn Sleeves, Cardinal, and Pope. They are comparatively innocent productions—alcoholically speaking, the book warms to its work as it goes on,—and derive their names from having been given to "ancient dignitaries of the Church when they honoured the University with a visit." You will notice the care they took in making up a prescription for doing themselves well in those days, and a particularly abhorrent vice of which they were too often guilty.

"Make several incisions in the rind of a lemon, stick cloves in the incisions, and roast the lemon at a slow fire. Put small but equal quantities of cinnamon, cloves, mace, and all-spice, and a race of ginger into a saucepan, with half a pint of water; let it boil till it is reduced by one-half. Boil one bottle of port wine; burn a portion of the spirit out of it by applying a lighted paper to the saucepan. Put the roasted lemon and spice into the wine, stir it up well, and let it stand near the fire for ten minutes. Rub a few knobs of sugar on the

rind of a lemon, put the sugar into a bowl or jug with the juice of half a lemon (not roasted), pour the wine into it, grate some nutmeg into it, sweeten to your taste, and serve it up with the lemon and spice floating in it."

Boiled port! They *boiled* it! The man who would boil port would boil his mother like an egg.

The variants "differ only from Bishop as the species from the genus." For Lawn Sleeves they boiled madeira or sherry; for Cardinal they boiled claret; and for Pope they went the whole hog and boiled champagne. They boiled champagne. Lawn Sleeves had three glasses of hot calves'-feet jelly added, too; what on earth they stuck that in for I don't know. We are told elsewhere that it was no good with port, for "when port wine comes in contact with calves'-feet jelly it immediately assumes a disagreeable muddy appearance." I don't wonder.

From the sacerdotal to the soldier; next on the list comes Negus, said to have been invented by a Colonel of that name. In its make-up it is much the same as Bishop and the rest. The Colonel boiled his port and other wines; but he seems to have been a less seasoned vessel than the "ancient dignitaries of the Church," as he doubled the amount of water that was agreeable to them. Indeed, a Dr Willich says that Negus is one of the most innocent and wholesome species of drink, and has virtue in strengthening the stomach. He recommends insulting his port with Seville oranges in place of lemons, and remarks that "Negus, if taken in great quantities, is more stimulant and drying than pure wine." Drying is a queer word.

There is White Wine Negus, and Port Wine Negus; for that matter we are told that it can be made with any wine, or with several sorts mixed together. That last remark is one for the Colonel.

The mention of Punch will strike a familiar chord; we may be innocent in Bishop, Negus, and the like, but Punch is a thing that most of us have tackled at one time or another. Not as described here, though; ours was probably a mere mixture of whisky, lemons, and hot water; our book gives us fourteen varieties without mentioning whisky once. It also does honour to the subject with an introductory paragraph, in which opposite opinions are given on this "compound drink." One, Dr Cheyne, who got himself down from thirty-two stone to about eleven by dieting, insisted that the only wholesome ingredient in it was the water. He was a celebrated Scottish physician, and no doubt knew what was what. But Dr Willich (*q.v.a.*), while asserting that after a heavy meal it is improper, declares that with a just amount of acid it is an excellent antiseptic, and good at resisting

putrefaction. It looks as if he were trying to be funny. Still, I never heard of any one who wanted to drink Punch bothering his head about its doing him good; joviality and warmth are enough for him.

Out of this important section we may allow ourselves one recipe in full, and may as well follow the book by starting with Oxford Punch. It is a sound efficient specimen, though not the most ferocious, and has the facetious alternative, "or Classical Sherbet."

"Extract the juice from the rind of three lemons by rubbing loaf-sugar on it. The peeling of two Seville oranges and two lemons, cut extremely thin. The juice of four Seville oranges and ten lemons. Six glasses of calves'-feet jelly in a liquid state. Stir these well together in a jug. Pour two quarts of boiling water on the mixture, cover the jug closely, and place it near the fire for a quarter of an hour. Strain the liquid through a sieve into a punch bowl or jug, sweeten with a bottle of capillaire (*note*—a sirop made from maidenhair), and add half a pint of white wine, a pint of French brandy, a pint of Jamaica rum, and a bottle of orange shrub; the mixture to be stirred as the spirits are poured in."

Here we have two footnotes that are applicable to Punch in general. If you are afraid of dry gripes, shun the use of limes instead of lemons; "Arbuthnot, in his work on aliments, says 'the West India dry gripes are occasioned by lime juice in Punch.'" (It's always the salmon.) Beware, too, of ignorant servants and waiters who put oxalic acid into Punch to give it a flavour; such a practice cannot be too severely censured. If a servant had tried that game on with my grandfather, who weighed over fourteen stone as an undergraduate, he would not have remained ignorant for long.

That is your Classical Sherbet; it has derivatives which arise from substitution for one or more of its elements, with the exception of Spiced Punch, which is the same with spices added. An improvement, one would think. For Tea Punch the jelly is omitted, and green tea takes the place of the water. That must have been a soul-stirrer. We are told that "it has been much esteemed by those who have partaken of it. It is invariably drank hot." Red Punch demands port and red-currant jelly instead of white wine and calves'-feet jelly. This is recommended as a summer drink when put into a bucket of ice, but "care must be taken that the ice-water does not get into the jug that contains the Punch." I don't know why; danger of an explosion, perhaps. And there is Gin Punch, in which a couple of bottles of gin replace the rum, the brandy, and the shrub. A seductive drink, no doubt,

but liable to give the devotee hob-nailed liver.

We now come to two very fine specimens, the Royal and the Oxford Milk. The Royal has no nonsense about it, no scientific making-up of a prescription. There are lemons, but fundamentally it consists merely of a pint of rum and a pint of port, against a pint of boiling water. Two to one, and mixed at that, is pretty fair. Oxford Milk Punch was made on a large scale; a gallon of cold water, the juice of twenty limes (but how about dry gripes?) and eight pot oranges, whatever they are, a quart of milk, and three quarts each of brandy and orange brandy shrub. For the grave don by way of a night-cap, either of these should have filled the bill. One would have to be careful in making them up; a drop on one's clothes might burn a hole. And they, certainly the Royal, should not be near a naked light. I knew a Colonel once who had invented a particularly devastating brew, even allowing for a temperature below zero and the most biting wind I have ever known. One Christmas night he had compounded a bowl, and I, guest and sycophant, was helping in its reduction. Well on in the debauch he went out of the room for a moment and, foreseeing other glasses yet to come, I leant forward and poured the contents of my full tumbler on to the fire. An immense blue flame, enveloping the entire chimney-piece and apparently my face as well, soared suddenly to the ceiling and vanished.

There are other punches, interesting individually, but colourless after the last two. But the section ends somewhat unexpectedly with a recipe for lemonade. It follows Egg Punch, and is "converted" from it by leaving out the wine and spirits!

After punch, possets; these begin mildly and end magnificently. Milk Posset is made up of a gill of white wine and a pint of boiled milk, with lemon rind, as always, and nutmeg; and, "the more to promote perspiration," is resolved into pepper posset by the addition of pepper. Cider and Perry Posset we need not bother about, except to note that brandy comes into them, and we can pass with a shudder the mixture that bears the loathsome name of Treacle Beer. But Rum Booze is nobly named, and is worthy of resurrection.

> "The yolk of eight eggs well beaten up, with some pulverised sugar and a grated nutmeg; rind of a lemon; put the sugar, a piece of cinnamon, and a bottle of white wine (or port, but it is 'less palatable') into a clean saucepan; when the wine boils take it off the fire; add a glass of cold white wine (or port), put it into a spouted jug, and pour it gradually among the yolks, &c., keeping them stirred with a spoon; then pour the mixture from one vessel to

another till it foams; add half a pint of rum,"

and the result is described as "very intoxicating." The glass of cold wine is added to prevent the liquor from getting curdled, as it would do if it met the eggs when boiling.

Beer Flip is the same as Rum Booze, except that a quart of strong beer takes the place of the wine, and that sometimes a glass of gin is added. It "is generally given to servants at Christmas and other high festivals of our Church."

And here we come to the sounding Rumfustian, which does honour to its gorgeous name. It is a compound of Rum Booze and Beer Flip. It demands—

> "The yolks of twelve eggs.
> One quart of strong beer.
> One bottle of white wine.
> Half a pint of gin.
> The peeling of a lemon.
> A small quantity of cinnamon.
> And sufficient sugar to sweeten it."

The Hell-broth is prepared in the same way as Rum Booze, and "such is its intoxicating property that none but hard drinkers will venture to regale themselves with it a second time." May they have enjoyed the first. A footnote adds that home-brewed beer is recommended, as some common brewers and publicans mix with their beer sulphuric acid, copperas, tobacco, capsicum, cocculus indicus, coriander seed, alum, and burnt sugar.

Cold Tankard, Wassail Bowl or Swig, Brown Betty, Lamb's Wool, Metheglin, Mead, Braggon, and Bragget are among those that still remain. They have lovely names like country flowers, and all have merit; Metheglin, for example, if taken immoderately, doth stupefy more than any other liquor; but a word like Rumfustian spells anti-climax, and we can do no better than wind up with the Oxford Grace Cup. This, with the customary adornments, was a blend of three half-pints of strong beer and a bottle of mountain wine (? whisky). At civic feasts in Oxford, "before the removal of the cloth the Grace Cup is introduced, and the Mayor receives it standing; his right and left-hand guests also rise from their seats while he gives the toast 'Church and King.' The Cup is then passed round, no one presuming to apply his lips until two persons have risen from their seats. This custom is ascribed to the practice of the Danes heretofore in England, who frequently used to stab or cut the throats of the natives while they were drinking, the persons standing being sureties that the one holding the cup should come to no harm while partaking of it."

THROUGH THE UNTINTED PANE.

BY VIVIAN GORDON.

IV. KING SALMON AND ROAST DUCK.

THE Skipper had frequently impressed upon me that, if I ever went to Bolsheretsk, there were two things I must insist on having: one was king salmon head, and the other was some of Vishnevsky's roast duck.

"If dere's any fish in Paradise," he told me once, "I hope it will be king salmon. My friend"—and he made the French gourmet's gesture of kissing the tips of his fingers—"it's *won*derful. An' only one odder t'ing I shall ask St Peter for. I shall say, 'If Vishnevsky's here already, please may I have some of his Swedish roast duck?' An' if I find I can get plenty of dose two t'ings, I shall tell dem dey can pay d' cabman an' bring my bag in, because I've come to stay."

As a matter of fact, I could have named several other things I was sure he would ask St Peter for, as the Skipper—like most Russians of my experience—was very fond of his food. However, I was satisfied to accept this statement as merely being his picturesque way of conveying to me that king salmon and Vishnevsky's roast duck were the two most important products of Bolsheretsk.

In connection with the latter delicacy, I learned that Vishnevsky apparently had two ministering angels, one being a China boy with the unangelic name of Ah Fat, and the other a Finnish countess, who shall be nameless. Ah Fat ministered to him from his immediate *entourage* as his cook, valet, factotum, and *fidus Achates*, while the countess's ministrations were conducted from a dainty flat in Nikolaevsk, through the medium of an affectionate nature, an instructed and eclectic taste for good cooking, and a fairly amenable cheque-book.

Vishnevsky, it seems, was formerly manager of a bank in Nikolaevsk, and although of a gay and debonair nature, showed every promise of making a success of life. He gambled, of course—everybody seemed to in Siberia in those days, and their clubs were just private gaming-houses,—but having a clear and steady head, he had always contrived to keep within his means, and, on the whole, he was a successful player. It would seem, however, that this is not enough to protect a habitual gambler from disaster, for one new year there came to him one of his gaming cronies—also a banker

—and confessed that, having lost heavily for some time past, he had been drawing on his bank's money to keep himself going until he could recoup, but that—the old tale, instead of recouping he had lost more and more—his luck was unbelievable, and now he was faced with the position that unless he could put his bank funds right immediately for the yearly balance, he would be discovered, disgraced, and ruined. He was an older man than Vishnevsky. He was married, had a good wife, three fine children almost grown up —old enough to understand and feel ashamed of him. They would shrink from him, their father, as from a criminal; it was terrible. Could not Vishnevsky, who was a bachelor, help him? Vishnevsky helped him. He went and took money from his own bank, and gave it to this whimpering gamester. Then he sent in his resignation to his directors, announcing a shortage in the funds under his charge due to his having helped himself therefrom to recoup his gambling losses, which amounts he now found himself unable to replace. The directors were alarmed and mystified. They caused investigations to be made, which showed his statement to be correct as to the shortage, but could find no indication of his having been losing at the tables; on the contrary, his friends all stated that he had been having a remarkable run of good fortune. Vishnevsky, however, stood stolidly to his tale, and as his miserable friend supported him in this with a profound and impenetrable silence, his directors in the end had no choice but to accept his own statement and dismiss him from their service. They might, indeed, have handed him over to the police, but they magnanimously spared him this, being apparently convinced that there was something in the matter that they were unable to fathom, and that, whatever had driven him to this defalcation, it was not his own dishonesty. And so Vishnevsky passed out of the banking circles of Nikolaevsk, and to all but his most loyal and intimate friends this promising young banker entirely disappeared.

He did not, however, cease to be seen at the countess's dainty flat, for she, fortunately for him, was amongst the loyal friends who still believed in him. And when March came she very generously provided him with a few thousand roubles, with which he proceeded to Vladivostock, and at the annual auction of fisheries conducted there by the Government, he bought the rights for one year to a salmon fishing concession near the mouth of the Bolshaya River in Kamchatka. It was an extremely fortunate combination of circumstances for a fellow in his position that there was such a free field of activity available so near at hand, and such a well-disposed friend to open

the door to it for him. In this business his ruined name and credit bothered him no whit. Taking with him a Russian assistant and the faithful Ah Fat, and the balance of the countess's roubles, he went to Hakodate, where he hired a number of Japanese fishermen, and with good hard money bought food, nets, salt, bamboos, and mats to make a shed for the men, and a light wooden hut for himself and his two personal henchmen, and in due course sailed by one of the ships of the Russian Volunteer Fleet for Kamchatka. Here he set up his hut, his mat-shed, and his long trap-net, and took the fish that, in due course, flocked into the latter, and rough-salted them *à la japonaise*—a process that requires no gear beyond a couple of trestle tables and some mats, no storage room because it is simply done in mat-covered piles on the open beach, and no packing materials because it gets so dry and hard that it is just shipped away loose. His roes he sold by contract to Borisovsky & Co., who sent their own men to work it up into red caviar for the Russian market; and at the end of the season he took his salted fish to Hakodate, where, in accordance with the excellent local custom, he was able to sell and deliver them immediately for prompt cash payment at the current market price. With the money thus obtained he returned to Vladivostock, and the following spring bought the same concession again for a period of three years, and, in addition thereto, another one-year concession in the same neighbourhood.

Thus was Vishnevsky the banker metamorphosed into a fisherman; and thus was he enabled to look the world once more in the face, and to clap the devil on the back and inform him that, as far as Anton Nikolaevich Vishnevsky was concerned, he was "sold again."

I am afraid you must be beginning to think that I have led you a long way away from our roast duck, to which, very possibly, you are attaching undue importance for the reason that (purely, I assure you, because it looks intriguing) I have included it in the title of this narration. As a matter of fact, however, I have been approaching it by a circuitous path, and can now tell you briefly that, before Vishnevsky sailed away that first summer to essay his luck with the salmon of Kamchatka, his worldly angel summoned his Celestial one—by which I mean, of course, that the countess sent for Ah Fat,—and let her *chef* instruct him in the art of producing a few of the dishes of which she knew his master was fond, and amongst these was a Swedish method of preparing roast duck.

So it fell that, when the Skipper happened to visit Bolsheretsk that year, Vishnevsky regaled him with roast duck of

a delicacy and subtlety of flavour unencountered in his simple experience. And this having been preceded by the head of a king salmon that tasted as the Skipper had never imagined a fish *could* taste, and the whole incident having been enacted in a beatifying atmosphere of old friendship renewed, and enlivened, doubtless, by an adequate supply of vodka, the Skipper had apparently returned from his visit with an ineradicable conviction that nowhere else on earth, nor yet in Paradise (until Vishnevsky reached there), could two such dishes be obtained: wherefore his insistence that if ever I went to Bolsheretsk I should make sure not to miss this epicurean opportunity.

I should explain that in Kamchatka one thought so largely in terms of fishing that, when the name of a place was mentioned, one almost invariably referred to the fishing area in that vicinity—in the place itself one had usually not the least interest. So when we spoke of Bolsheretsk, we referred solely to the group of fisheries about the mouth of the river Bolshaya, where Vishnevsky's concession was situated, and where also Borisovsky & Co. operated a large pickling factory, having the sole rights to all commercial fishing in the river itself. The actual village of Bolsheretsk was situated some thirty miles up the river, and I doubt if any of the fishery folk had ever been there, or had the least interest in doing so. As far as concerned myself, I suppose my real reason for wishing to go there was a desire to see all I possibly could of the country without forsaking my duties; and Bolsheretsk offered me very excellent justification for a visit, in that it was very desirable that I should report to my principals on the kinds of fish caught in that area and on the prospects for canneries there. Moreover, with the erection of our cannery at Ozernoi nearly finished, and the fish not due to arrive for about a fortnight, boredom was beginning to menace me. So when, one afternoon during the last week of June, the Skipper came and told me that if I wanted to go to Bolsheretsk I had better get my things aboard the *Chaika* at once, I gladly hurried off to the village, packed a bag, and sent it along to the mess hut, ready to be taken off at any time. Solovieff I found was to go also, having likewise a report to make to his directors, and doubtless having other reasons, real and professed, very similar to my own. About eight o'clock, having supped on shore, we were conveyed aboard the *Chaika*, but, as usual on these trips, there were delays in getting away. Finally, about 9.30 the Skipper came aboard, accompanied by the *Chaika's* captain, and handed Solovieff an envelope which, he said, contained a message for Russia which he

desired him to have despatched without fail from Haikovipât. He returned ashore immediately, and shortly afterwards we hove anchor, and by ten o'clock were steaming off for Bolsheretsk in a thick fog.

The *Chaika* was originally a British trawler, and had sailed for many years with one of the East Coast fishing fleets under the pleasant name of *Princess May*. Then Borisovsky's had bought her and sent her out here as a tender to their Kamchatka salmon fisheries and caviar stations, transferring her to the Russian flag and renaming her *Chaika*, which means sea-gull. She was well named, for she rode the water like a gull, with a graceful and easy motion; and on my improvised bunk on the upholstered saloon seat in the aftermost bend of the counter I was soon comfortably rocked to sleep as if swinging in a hammock.

And here I would like to give you an example of the fascinations of navigating in these waters. The available charts placed the coast-line at this part some ten to fifteen miles west of its actual position. That is to say that, if the point from which we started had been correctly ascertained by sextant and chronometer and pricked off on the chart, we would have been shown as lying at least ten miles inland. Borisovsky's concession at Bolsheretsk, on the other hand, lay, according to the chart, about eighty miles to the northward of us, but was actually only sixty-seven. And we started in the dark of night and in a dense fog. By what did the captain set his course? When I asked him he smiled a fat jovial smile, and told me that he smelt his way; and as that seems just as likely as that he steered by the chart, I pass it on to you to believe or not at your own entire discretion.

But whether the captain steered by smell, feel, or instinct, we were still comfortably afloat the following morning, and apparently aiming for some definite point on the low, flat, featureless streak of land that was visible some miles away to starboard. The fog had lifted, but the sky was overcast, and the sea reflected its greyness. In fact, if you can imagine one of those grey canvas backgrounds that they have in photographers' studios, with a thin dark line drawn across the middle of it, you have a very realistic impression of the approach to the Bolshaya River as I saw it that morning; and, for the matter of that, as most people must have seen it, having in mind the normal gloomy habits of the Okhotsk Sea.

Well, now, I do not wish you to suspect me of being romantic, but I confess I had been trying to key myself up to a proper sense of appreciation at my first sight of the "Great River"—for that is what its name, *Bolshaya Rieka*, means,—and I would have liked

to find its approaches a trifle more impressive. For this river was, two hundred years ago, the first haven of Russian explorers setting out from Okhotsk to solve the various riddles of the North Pacific—America's relation to Siberia, Japan's relation to Kamchatka, the mysterious "Terra de Yesso," and so forth. In 1727, Bering, Spanberg, and Chirikof, with the *Fortune* and the *Lodiya*, entered the river, bringing all the supplies for Bering's first expedition, and most of the material—apart from the timber—for building and equipping his ship, the *Gabriel*. All this they landed here and transported, during the winter, six hundred miles overland to Nijne Kamchatsk, one party alone using seventy-eight sledges. Then, in 1730, Fedorof and Gwosdef, the first white men to reach America from the west, called in here in that same *Gabriel* on their way out from Okhotsk to search for "the Large Country." And Bering, again, with the *St Peter* and *St Paul* and two supply ships, put into the river in October 1740 at the outset of his fatal second voyage. Thus, in addition to having become Kamchatka's regular port of communication with Russia *viâ* Okhotsk, the Bolshaya River was, to Russia's explorers of the North Pacific, the first step on the road to the unknown; and again, for those who were fortunate enough to return, it marked the last stage on the voyage home. It therefore had historical associations enough to establish for it an identity far above the mere material (even if succulent) items of food with which the Skipper was content to connect it; and I personally in surveying it was prepared to tint my gaze with some of the glamour of its adventurous past.

I was to be disappointed—but, however, let us first arrive and get ashore.

Due to the fog, and having had a strong adverse tide for part of the journey, we did not come to anchor off Borisovsky's concession till eleven in the morning. And we were anchored in the sea—not in a river,—and before us was a most uninspiring view. As far as the eye could reach in either direction stretched a broad strip of greyish-coloured beach, daubed at regular intervals to the northward with dark smudges which represented the huts, boats, and paraphernalia of coastal fishing concessions, off the nearest of which a Japanese steamer was lying. Behind this, relieved only by occasional patches of scrub, was a flat low-lying plain of tundra, reaching away and away into hazy distance to where, some thirty miles off by the map, a chain of snow-streaked hills arose, bearing away to the northward. Towards the southern end of these was a white tent-shaped volcano, and far away to the south, amid the vague shapes of further snow-clad mountains,

was the great conical mass of the volcano Opalnaya. These mountains, however, were so faint and distant that they formed but a dim background to the picture immediately before us—namely, endless beach and the wide dreary plain of tundra.

And, anyway, where was the Great River? I had expected something vast, impressive, and this not from my own vain imaginings, but with reason. For not only do all old maps and most new ones show it with a wide estuary, but also it is recorded that when Bering entered the river with the *Fortune* and *Lodiya*, there were three miles of shallow water between his anchorage and the bank, so he had to discharge his ships with small boats, which took him a whole month. Three miles to the bank on which he chose to discharge his stores! Then how many to the other? Still more, one must imagine. However, to avoid exaggeration let us content ourselves with saying that the estuary must have been several miles wide. Well, then, where was it? Here we were, anchored in the sea, directly opposite what I was assured was Borisovsky's concession on the Bolshaya River. We could see, over the sand dunes, the black roofs of the sheds and the gleaming tops of the salt piles, but not a sign of a river.

When I asked the captain about it, he said that if I was really so keen to see the estuary he would take me up to the "chart-room," as that was the only place where *he* had ever seen it. The chart-makers, he said, seemed to have got their information where I got mine, and to satisfy themselves they had drawn a fine-looking estuary. But he personally had never seen any, and had no reason for believing that there ever was any. But the river itself was just the other side of the sand-hills, and flowed into the sea about seven versts farther south, and if a sight of the river would satisfy me, we could go ashore right away and have a look at it.

So we went. The *Chaika's* little gig, manned by six Koreans, was already waiting, and landed us on a beach of gravel and black sand. At irregular intervals along the beach were great piles of gravel six and eight feet high, as if some school treat of brobdingnagian children had been building castles there. The culprit, however, was none other than the old Okhotsk, who heaves up these masses in the playful fury of his autumn gales. At the back of the beach were the usual sand-hills, from the top of which we looked down on the largest salmon-pickling station in Kamchatka. Close by where we stood were two great white mounds of salt—Port Said for the fish, and Crimean for the caviar,—and, on their left, half a dozen old Japanese fishing-boats lying bottom up, some of which a gang of men were using as

tables on which to overhaul the station's seine nets. In front of this was a flat sandy space some hundred yards wide, on which was set out in orderly piles a stock of over two thousand empty barrels, and along the farther side of this space was a long, low, black building, covering a considerable area—the pickling shed. Scattered about on the right were three or four smaller wooden buildings, which constituted the living quarters. On either side of the pickling shed a number of fishing-boats were drawn up and one motor-boat, and immediately beyond these, just on the other side of the pickling shed, was the river, a hundred and fifty to two hundred yards wide, and not more than that same distance from the sea. Anchored in the river were two or three more fishing-boats and another motor-launch, and from the way they tugged at their moorings it was evident that the stream was very fast. And beyond the river, and not more than a few feet above its level, was that weary waste of tundra.

So this at last was the Great River! And in defiance of all the maps it was flowing, as far as the eye could reach, almost due south along the coast instead of due west into the sea. Well, one thing at least was certain to me when I noted the swiftness of the stream, and that was that neither Bering nor anybody else ever sailed a ship into *this* river. Later acquaintance showed that some miles farther up it opened out into a lagoon of more than a mile in width, from which it extended eastwards in a series of broads, separated by low marshy islands. This was evidently the original estuary, from which, doubtless, it used to flow straight out into the sea. But the records show that it was shallow even in Bering's time; and doubtless ultimately the bar, fed with silt from the river and with gravel hurled back on it from the sea by the autumn gales, must have entirely closed up, forcing the river to seek another course. So that now from the seaward extremity of its estuary it flows in a narrow stream for about eight miles southwards along the sea-shore before finding its unimpressive outlet; and for practically the whole of this distance it is separated from the sea only by a grassy sand-bank one or two hundred yards wide. Thus with the passing of the era of those hardy maritime explorers did the Great River close its doors to further seaborne intercourse, and settle down to prepare itself for its present less showy but valuable rôle of providing some of the world's toiling multitudes with food, for the Bolshaya is the richest salmon river on the west coast of Kamchatka. Thus also, perhaps, did it justify the practical-minded Skipper in forgetting its past glories and in finding it of interest merely as a purveyor of king salmon and roast duck.

As we stood on the sand-hills surveying the scene, I became conscious of something gently prodding my calves, and looking round, saw a magnificent Irish setter which, on my speaking to it, promptly came forward and submitted us to a friendly inspection. Solovieff on seeing it immediately gave vent to his admiration.

"What a head! What a coat! What pride of race in his carriage! By St Peter! I would like to buy that dog."

"Ten thousand roubles will do it," said a voice behind us, "and that, to a director of Borisovsky's, should be a bagatelle."

We turned round and saw close by us the smiling figure of Vishnevsky, somewhat wild-looking with his pointed red beard and vast moustache, but always debonair, his cheerful face and the jaunty angle of his peaked cap suggesting that he had not a care in the world.

"I have only two possessions of any value," he continued, coming forward with hand extended to greet us, "and these are Rufus and Ah Fat. Being a poor fisherman, I am willing to sell them, but being an ex-banker I deal in large figures. When may I expect your cheque?"

Solovieff grasped his hand, and told him that at that rate he might go on expecting for a long time; but meantime where had he sprung from so silently? It transpired that Vishnevsky had been at Tsujimura's adjoining coastal concession to receive a supply of salt that the Japanese steamer had brought up for him, and, seeing the *Chaika* arrive, had come along the sand-hills to learn such news as there might be from Ozernoi. Had not Ivan Alexandrovich come with us, he asked, and what had led us two to desert our cannery and come to Bolsheretsk? Solovieff explained that the Skipper couldn't get away because of the constant risk of trouble with the men, but that we had come up for various purposes—to bring caviar-sieves for distribution to their caviar stations along the coast, to collect and bring back a Kamchadal priest to perform the benediction of the new cannery, to despatch a telegram for Ivan Alexandrovich, and, as concerned himself especially, to inspect their concession here and the new hatchery, and report on them to St Petersburg.

And, I added, to divert ourselves generally at the same time with a little sight-seeing; but, above all, under urgent instructions from Captain Morozoff, to visit him and request him to regale us with the two famous local dishes—namely, king salmon head and some of his wonderful Swedish roast duck.

Vishnevsky clapped me on the shoulder at this, and asserted that I had given the only valid reasons of the whole lot, for important persons like ourselves could have done all the rest by deputy. That

being so, he urged that we should make our headquarters at his concession. In any case, Borisovsky's manager, Petroff, was away somewhere on the *Pelageia*, and the assistant manager was a poor fellow of no temperament, a dull host, and he didn't think he had been left the key of the vodka, so to men of our calibre there was really no alternative.

This kind invitation we were obliged, however, to decline, as it was obviously inadmissible that a director of Borisovsky's should come up for the declared purpose of reporting on their concession and go and stay at some one else's several miles off, even if the vodka *was* locked up. So we compromised on the arrangement that Vishnevsky should stay with us for the present, and we would then go and visit him as soon as we had got our business off our consciences. This being settled, we went to hunt up the untemperamental assistant manager, whom we found in the pickling shed. He was instructed—somewhat peremptorily, for Solovieff was ruffled at not being met—to see at once about landing the caviar-sieves and distributing them along the coast. For Borisovsky's, apart from their two fishing concessions on this coast, operated twenty caviar stations on other people's concessions, buying the roes from them under contract, and sending caviar makers of their own to live at each such concession throughout the season to treat and pack the caviar from the fresh roes as the fish were caught. This, of course, is the so-called "red caviar" that is a much favoured *zakouska*[1] with the Russians, though hardly known in England.

Petroff, we found, had left a week before on the *Pelageia* to visit the company's fishing concession on the Anadyr River, which flows out into the Bering Sea near its northern extremity, less than two degrees below the Arctic circle, and a journey of about fourteen hundred miles by sea from the Bolshaya. Here also the company operated a large salmon-pickling station.

To me the idea of this fishery under the Arctic rim seemed so remote and venturesome as almost to savour of romance; but it may be of interest to note that the Cossack explorers of Siberia reached the Anadyr before they reached Kamchatka, and to them Kamchatka was the extreme of remoteness. From the upper reaches of the Anadyr they descended overland to Kamchatka, and although the peninsula lies approximately between the same parallels of latitude as the British Isles, their only route to it for twenty years was *vid* the Kolyma and Anadyr Rivers, passing for several hundreds of miles within the Arctic circle. Even to-day this idea of the remoteness of Kamchatka seems

[1] Hors d'œuvre.

to linger, and to many people the name appears to suggest some sort of offshoot of the polar regions, whereas actually the concession at which we were building our cannery was on approximately the same parallel as London, while Bolsheretsk is about level with Yarmouth. The great climatic difference arises, of course, from the fact that, whereas the British Isles are warmed by the Gulf Stream drift, Kamchatka has on the east an icy current that flows out of the Arctic through the Bering Strait, and on the west the Sea of Okhotsk—a sea so cold that, to quote two widely separated examples, Spanberg, sailing from Okhotsk to the Bolshaya in June 1738, was delayed by ice; while in 1913 a Japanese steamer returning from the fisheries of Okhotsk to Hakodate spent forty-five hours steaming through a field of drift ice off northern Saghalien between the 8th and 10th of July. So, even if Kamchatka's remoteness is exaggerated, its reputation for coldness is reasonably well founded. In August, by the sea-shore, I have found grass and lilies growing up through several inches of snow.

I do not know how interesting a man Petroff was, but his assistant's personality was certainly not diverting, and possibly this fact unconsciously led Solovieff and myself to accelerate our business about the station as much as was possible. Nevertheless it took us all of that day and part of the next morning, Solovieff's progress having been delayed by the arrival of Lavroff, the *ispravnik*[1] of the Bolsheretsk area, of whom, as the Government's only resident representative on the adjacent two or three hundred miles of coast, a certain amount of notice had perforce to be taken. Finally, a little before noon on that second morning, it was decided on Vishnevsky's suggestion that we should take Lavroff to see Borisovsky's new salmon hatchery, some distance up the river; and as it was desirable to make a prompt start in order to catch the last of the flood tide, we very soon afterwards found ourselves plugging up-stream on one of the station's motor-boats.

As a way of creating a diversion and finding us something definite to do, the trip was unquestionably a success; but as a means of impressing Lavroff with anything except the poor amount of work they had got done at the hatchery, I should say it was a failure. And in another respect it was simply tantalising, for the hatchery lay at the end of one of the nearer reaches of the broads, and about every fifty yards of our progress along this part of the river we put up a few duck. Duck flew across our bows, over our heads; on all sides we seemed

[1] District chief of police.

to be seeing duck, and none of us had brought a gun.

"The trouble with you fellows," said Vishnevsky, "is that you keep confusing your objectives. You come up here for the express purpose of eating roast duck——"

"Pardon me," interrupted Solovieff, very conscious of the presence of Lavroff, "I came up here to inspect our fishing station and hatchery. When that is done I am quite prepared to go out for a little shooting, and perhaps the *gospodin*[1] *ispravnik* would come with us."

Lavroff smilingly shook his head, and Vishnevsky, who was no respecter of persons, continued—

"Well, well. Any one would think we didn't know that you can't get any duck at Ozernoi that aren't fishy, and that you've just come up here to get away from tinned food."

Then, disregarding Solovieff's indignant protest that Borisovsky's used nothing but fresh chilled food out of their refrigerator ships, he went on to suggest that, if Solovieff could escape from his business conscience after he had seen the hatchery, we should all return and establish ourselves at his place, sending the launch back to Borisovsky's meantime for our guns and kit, and that after having lunch we should come back here and shoot. And if Solovieff still wasn't anxious to eat any of the duck, he needn't, but he and I *would*. We all concurred in this except Lavroff, who said that, unfortunately, his duties didn't permit of his going off on shooting trips. So, shortly after re-entering the narrow part of the river, we stopped opposite to where the roof of a rather disreputable-looking little wooden house showed over the crest of the seaward bank, and here, about two in the afternoon, Solovieff, Vishnevsky, and myself — and Rufus — disembarked. The launch, with Lavroff, continued immediately to Borisovsky's station, from whence our guns and baggage were to be sent back to us.

Vishnevsky's house was a flimsy wooden structure, about thirty feet by eight, standing at the back of the beach, facing the sea. It had been supplied and erected by a Japanese contractor from Hakodate for a price of five hundred yen, of which I should judge that at least half was profit. The timber was of the lightest, the walls consisted of gaping planks of matchwood, and the roof was simply weather-boarding. Over the walls a covering of Japanese straw mats had been attached by means of wooden battens, to make up to some extent for its deficiencies in weather-tightness, and at the same time, I imagine, to hide these deficiencies from its purchaser. The roof, however, had originally been given

[1] Mr.

no such protection, and as the weather-boarding began to warp in the sun, it had to be covered later. This, I assume, he had had done by his own fishermen with surplus mats from their own mat-shed, which stood close by; and as timber and nails are scarce in those parts, and there are no stones within miles, these had been weighted, battened, or tied down with anything that came handy—pieces of wood, a nail here and there, bits of rope, and one or two strips of old fishing-net. But as considerable portions of the mats managed to escape these clumsy attachments whenever the wind blew, and as any mats that blew entirely off were apparently just thrown back anyhow on to the roof pending such time as some one should find the energy and the wherewithal to replace them, the roof presented a most tatterdemalion aspect, partly covered with mats and netting, partly exposed, and with balks of wood and heaps of matting lying about on it indiscriminately. There was certainly nothing about the appearance of Vishnevsky's house that suggested that one ought to have brought one's evening dress. On the other hand, there seemed to be something about it that subtly suited Vishnevsky's debonair personality, and I am sure he can have displayed no more genial ease of manner in doing the honours of his old banker's home in Nikolaevsk than he did in introducing us to his disreputable but hospitable shack in Kamchatka.

When Russians set out to rough it they seem to do it whole-heartedly, leaving behind them all thoughts of bodily comfort or of the embellishment of their surroundings. Thus the section of the hut that formed Vishnevsky's living room and bedroom contained no concessions to comfort beyond a wooden bunk, a table, a bench along the wall, and a couple of up-ended boxes for spare seats, and no attempt at adornment except a shelf supporting an array of bottles of vodka and other drinks, with variegated labels—his "picture gallery," he called it. Smiling a welcome to us was the China boy, Ah Fat, of whom I can tell you nothing distinctive except that he had a smile that is common to Chinese "boys" when they come to apply for a job, but that usually wears off within the first few days of employment. With Ah Fat, however, it appeared to be permanent; and whatever he was told to do he would nod and smile approvingly as if he considered it an excellent idea, and only wished he had thought of it himself, and would immediately hurry off to carry it out. My only explanation for this unusual phenomenon is that he found his lively master a source of continual entertainment—not, of course, unmixed with profit. As an instance of his willing and understanding nature—guided, doubtless, by his master's sound training,—

I will mention that, whereas Vishnevsky's only instructions on arriving were that lunch for three was required as quickly as possible, Ah Fat did not immediately dive into his kitchen and start preparing it. No, he went first to the "picture gallery" and took down the vodka and set it on the table with three glasses, and placed a dish of the inevitable *zakouska* [1] by it, in the form of cold boiled crab meat and smoked slices of king salmon. And only when he had forestalled our possible impatience by providing us with this pretty well-judged means of occupation did he retire to the lean-to that was his kitchen to set about his task.

So while Ah Fat proceeded to produce cheering sounds and pleasant odours from his own domain, the master and his guests obeyed the menial's unspoken behest to "get busy with that" by "getting busy" with the vodka and *zakouska* with unquestionable pleasure and increasing exhilaration. So much so, that by the time Ah Fat arrived with the soup we already had the makings of a very cheery gathering, and before the meal was more than half despatched, we had that gathering fully established as a going concern, with a large liquid capital and a membership of remarkable activity and capacity. And, strange to say, nothing seemed less present in our minds than any thought of shooting duck; so that instead of firing volleys of shot at unoffending birds, we shot salvoes of vodka at Dull Care and drove him utterly away. Empires might have tottered, and the salmon catch all turned to shrimps; almost anything, in fact—except some disaster to our picture gallery — could have happened without disturbing our perfect serenity. As for Solovieff, the genial stimulant seemed to lift the responsibilities of the St Petersburg directorate from his mind, and deposit there instead an enterprising spirit of revelry, which, prompted and abetted by the playful-minded Vishnevsky, soon made him the central figure of the gathering, proposing toasts, making speeches—which, however, were quickly squashed,—and launching animated arguments such as have a habit of developing on these occasions. Finally when, well on towards evening, the party decided that it was time to go out and take a little fresh air on the beach, he was engaging Vishnevsky in a lively discussion on the subject of wrestling, to which he had apparently devoted some study. The exact course of events from this point I do not closely recall, except that from wrestling Solovieff extended his discourse to *jiu-jitsu*, and that every now and then he broke off to give us practical and very vigorously executed demonstrations of various grips and

[1] Hors d'œuvres.

throws, as the result of one of which Vishnevsky suddenly found himself projected headlong upon the sand in a manner that suggested an abortive attempt to turn a cartwheel.

"*Diavol!*"[1] exclaimed Vishnevsky as he picked himself up, dusting sand and seaweed from his clothes, and puffing little clouds of sand from his vast moustache as he spoke. "Deuce take you and your Asiatic tricks. Doesn't your *jiu-jitsu* require that you should ring a bell or strike a gong before you start your acrobatics?"

Solovieff was full of apologies, somewhat marred, however, by hilarity.

"You may laugh, my friend," said Vishnevsky, "but this requires a *revanche*. You will wrestle with me again; but this time Vivian Viviânovich"—this is how they had Russianised me during the course of our cheery lunch, in order to get away from the formality of our English "Mr"—"Vivian Viviânovich will give the word, so that at least I have time to cross myself before you throw me away."

"But, my dear fellow, what's the use?" protested Solovieff. "I know the game and you don't."

"That's all right," replied Vishnevsky; "all I ask is the privilege of choosing the place. Do you grant me that?"

"Certainly," assented Solovieff promptly.

"Well, then, the bout will take place in the sea, at about knee depth. That will hobble those devilishly nimble feet of yours, while I, as a fisherman, will be in my natural element. Is it agreed?"

Of course, Solovieff had no option but to agree, although his smile began to contain a dubious element. So, led by Vishnevsky, we all marched into the sea, the former stopping when the water was within a few inches of the tops of his knee-boots. Here they took up their positions, and the word being given by "Vivian Viviânovich," they began prancing around each other like a couple of aquatic kangaroos, sending out sheets of spray and splutterings of strange Slavonic curses. Then Solovieff clinched, and they got into a close hold, in which his face disappeared entirely in a mass of red whiskers. Locked in this grip they struggled and splashed around in the water for several minutes, both straining for a throw; but with Vishnevsky at a disadvantage against Solovieff's superior science, and Solovieff baffled by being deprived of his foot-play, it looked as if they might go on all night. However, any stalemate of this kind was abruptly forestalled by Solovieff stepping backwards, apparently into some kind of hole or trench in the sand, for he suddenly submerged, dragging Vishnevsky after him, and for

[1] The devil!

some moments there was practically nothing visible except froth and feet. When they reappeared—or rather, as soon as they became articulate after their reappearance,—fresh trouble nearly broke out owing to Solovieff accusing Vishnevsky of having known of the existence of the trench, and having elected to wrestle in the sea with the deliberate intention of pushing him into it. I confess that I had begun to have shrewd suspicions to that effect myself; but Vishnevsky stoutly protested his innocence of any such base designs, and then deftly turned the subject by suggesting that Vivian Viviânovich was laughing immoderately at them, and that they should therefore collect him and heave him into the ditch so as to put us all square. This proposal was met with great enthusiasm by Solovieff, and a determined attempt was made to carry it out, which, fortunately for myself, I was able to frustrate. At the same time I set myself to persuade them that it was urgent that they should get back to the house and get some dry clothes, and possibly something to warm them internally; and as the temperature of the water at that time of year was not much over 40°, and as the sun was already setting and a rather searching breeze was playing off the sea, it was not long before they began to feel effectively upon their persons the force of my arguments. So we started to retrace our steps towards the house, they with some reluctance at first; but as the wind got farther and farther through their sodden clothing their pace accelerated, and by the time we reached the hut we were going in really fine style.

Vishnevsky, with a view to the immediate provision of both external and internal warmth, took us straight to the kitchen and chased Ah Fat out of it to get the vodka, and when we had dealt swiftly with a large tot of the latter, he went out to see about the question of clothes. On his return he elicited an extraordinary outburst of explosive Russian from Solovieff by announcing that our bags had not yet come from Borisovsky's, so that there were no clothes of his own available. If Solovieff was willing, however, he would gladly help out by lending him some of his own underclothing; but there would be a difficulty about a coat and trousers, as he only brought two suits up to Kamchatka, which thus only left one dry one between the two of them. Then he had an inspiration. Like most people operating coast concessions, he used Japanese fishermen from the Hokkaido, and surely, he argued, the *sendo*[1] must keep some kind of a slop-chest of spare clothes to sell to any fisherman who might need them. Why not, then, procure an outfit for

[1] Head fisherman.

Solovieff from him? Nice warm padded clothes, and Solovieff was of rather short stocky build, so that they ought to fit—a splendid idea! He would send for the *sendo* to bring a selection, and he promptly called Ah Fat and gave the order.

Solovieff, good sportsman that he was, was quite willing to fall in with anything that would solve the question with a minimum amount of inconvenience to his host; but he looked rather taken aback when the *sendo* arrived with an armful of clothes, and he saw that most of them were made out of common red blankets. For this is a picturesque custom of the Hokkaido fishermen, who do not wear the long Japanese *kimono*, but a practical working suit of tunic, trousers, and gaiters, and sometimes an apron, any or all of which may be made of red blankets. Usually the tunics are lined with oil-paper to keep out wind and wet, and sometimes they are wadded; and they certainly provide a very warm, cheap, and suitable form of dress—for fishermen in cold climates. But for junior directors of large and influential companies — so influential, in fact, as to be receiving direct Government favour in the matter of concessions and facilities—surely a trifle *outré*? Solovieff rubbed his chin dubiously, and asked if the *sendo* hadn't anything "a little darker—black or grey, for instance"; while Vishnevsky, entirely unheeding, selected out-garments, and measured them roughly for fit against Solovieff's body. Finally, having chosen a complete suit, even to the apron, and entirely in red, he told the *sendo* to take the rest away, and thrusting his selection into Solovieff's arms, he urged him to get into them quickly before he caught pneumonia. Following which he withdrew to the living room to see about a change for himself.

Well, Solovieff very obviously didn't like it; but his shivering body was clamouring for dry garments, and when Ah Fat came in with some Christian underclothes and socks, and poured out another tot of vodka for him, he seemed to take consolation in these, and accordingly set about getting into them. I meantime joined Vishnevsky in the living room, where, somewhat to my surprise, I found the table already set for supper. However, although it did not really seem so very long since we had left that table, I confess that the idea of food was not repugnant. Perhaps it was the fresh air, or can it have been the vodka?

Vishnevsky, with dry clothes on him, seemed to be in higher spirits than ever. The *zakouska* was on the table, and the vodka was shortly brought there, and he seemed to have a zest for both as if he was about to break a week's fasting and abstinence. He clamoured impatiently for Solovieff to hurry and come to table; and

when at last our friend appeared, clad from head to foot in blanketing of a Mephistophelian red, and suggestive, more than anything, of a cold snap in Hades, his delight was uproarious. He haled him into the middle of the room to have a good look at him, and then clapped him on the shoulder and told him he was wonderful —a few finishing touches and he would be unique. He accordingly proceeded to knot a Japanese towel round Solovieff's head, after the manner of the workmen of that country, but turning the two ends upwards to give the effect of horns, following which he obtained a piece of charcoal from Ah Fat, and drew him a ferocious moustache and eyebrows, in the midst of which barbaric attributes his glittering *pince-nez* looked rather forlornly astray.

Then he sat him on the bench at the middle of the table, with his back to the wall, placed a row of bottles of liqueurs of various colours in front of him and a row of lighted candles on the shelf behind him, and turned out the lamp. The result was frankly alarming, for the shadow cast by the shelf threw Solovieff's figure into a mysterious gloom, through which the flickering uncertain light of the candles played tricks of distortion with his features, turning his bland smile into a fiendish grin, and giving him the appearance of some diabolic heathen joss, all the more horrific in that he was alive and moving. Obviously very pleased with the results of his efforts, Vishnevsky now announced him as the Grand Shaman of the Chukchees, and called upon him to make some pronouncements regarding our future, but first, if he didn't mind, to circulate the vodka and *zakouska*.

Personally, I am inclined to think that the Grand Shaman had been circulating the vodka to himself pretty freely while he was dressing, for he had submitted to all these preparations of Vishnevsky's with a beatific smile, and now set about his occult practices with a zest and freedom of imagination quite alien to the junior director of Borisovsky's in his normal state. Shamanism, it appears, is a cult still practised among the native inhabitants of the Arctic rim, including some nomadic races in Kamchatka, the chief exponents of which are the "shamans," who are the hereditary "medicine men" of the tribes. Working themselves up into a high state of hysterical frenzy, the shamans perform divinations, exorcise evil spirits, and in general act as the special *liaison* officers between the tribe and the spirit world. Apparently a magic drum is a *sine qua non* for this work, and Solovieff was accordingly presented with a biscuit tin to aid in his conjurations. This, however, produced such a fiendish din that its use was immediately suppressed; so the Grand Shaman, with great re-

source, adopted instead a kind of astrology of his own performed with the liqueur bottles. Using the Grand Marnier as the sun, he would get, say, the peppermint in "trine" and the peach liqueur in "quartile" or "sextile," and perhaps the brandy in "conjunction," following which he would pour himself out a little of each of these in a glass, sip them mysteriously, and then utter his deliverances. Considering his very recent accession to office and his consequent lack of experience, I think he did surprisingly well. He also achieved his pronouncements without having to work himself up into that exalted condition of frenzy that is apparently necessary to the native shamans; but, on the other hand, it must be admitted that he did everything possible to put himself into a high state of alcoholic inspiration.

His first prophecy was that on the following day there would be an outbreak, on the west coast of Kamchatka, of a strange and dire malady of the head, taking the form of acute aching, confusion of thought, and extreme lethargy. It would attack, in the first place, three white men in the neighbourhood of Bolsheretsk, and he would endeavour by his occult arts to confine it to them, but he could not protect or free those three men from it, as they themselves had requested it, and had even performed considerable libations in order to get it.

This prophecy, as far as any of the three men had the frankness to admit, appears to have been fulfilled to the letter.

He then, after a few brief astrological readjustments which produced another unholy mixture in his glass, predicted that on the same day these same three men, in spite of their malady, would carry out a great slaughter of ducks, to such wholesale effect that the vision would be obscured by falling birds, whose impact on the surface of the river would lash the waters into foam, rendering navigation difficult.

This forecast, as further perusal will show, proved somewhat exaggerated.

At this point the Grand Shaman wisely made a pause in order to eat some *zakouska*, which, to my mind, his peculiar astrological potations rendered most necessary. While he—and, in fact, all of us—were thus engaged, Ah Fat came in carrying a large platter on which lay the enormous head of a fish, all hot and steaming. And when I say "enormous," I mean really something that you might expect them to bring on in a pantomime of *Jack the Giant-Killer* among the giant's *hors d'œuvres*, for it cannot have been much under a foot long from the tip of the nose to where it had been cut off, just behind the gills. King salmon head! A whoop of welcome from the Grand Shaman, cheers from Vishnevsky and myself, smiles of pleasure and pride from Ah

Fat, who had not only cooked it, but also caught it—illicitly, in the river.

And here, I think, I must indulge in some explanations. King salmon—also known on the American side as spring salmon or chinook — is the largest of the whole salmon species, measuring upwards of four feet in length and weighing from forty to sixty pounds. He is also the earliest of the Pacific salmon to enter the rivers each year, arriving, in most of the localities he frequents, some weeks before the big run of "red," "dog," or "humpback" begins; and as he is much less numerous than these latter (which are the kinds of salmon that you meet in tins), the fishermen of Kamchatka do not, as a rule, make any special preparations for catching him. Hence none of the coastal nets had yet been set, for the coastal fishing is done with Japanese *taté-ami*, or "standing nets," consisting of a long leading net with a floating trap-net at the end of it, which are moored out at the beginning of the season, and not taken in until its close. Therefore, on this peculiar strip of coast with the sea in front and the river at the back, the mere sight of a king salmon before the coast nets had been set was, to any one who knew local conditions, clear evidence that the fish had been caught in the river, or, in other words, poached; and as Borisovsky's held the sole commercial fishing rights on the river, it might further be held to have been poached on their preserves.

Something of this sort was evidently filtering into the mind of the Grand Shaman, for after his first spontaneous burst of enthusiasm, he suddenly chilled off and fixed the head with a look of cold and suspicious scrutiny. Then he began reshuffling his Bacchanalian horoscope in an agitated manner, smacking the bottles down with great emphasis, and it seemed ominous to me that his divining potion this time consisted of neat brandy, poured out liberally into a tumbler. After communing deeply with this, he directed a gaze of foreboding at Vishnevsky, and said—

"Anton Nikolaevich, the Spirits of the Dark tell me that fish was caught in the river."

"Well, they are misrepresenting the facts to you," replied Vishnevsky, quite unabashed. "What really happened was that Ah Fat was paddling about on the river, crooning to himself about his native land, when this fish jumped into the boat."

"He should have put it back," returned the Grand Shaman inexorably.

"Oh, of *course*," assented Vishnevsky agreeably, "he would have done so; but, you see, the fish's nose hit him in the pit of the stomach and nearly knocked him out of the boat, and he was so surprised and indignant that he clubbed it with an oar and killed it.

Then," he continued with brilliant inspiration, "as it was no use putting it back he consulted me, and we decided to offer it to you, as concessionnaire of the river fishing, for supper to-night. Surely nothing could be more correct?"

This rather defeated the Grand Shaman, who sat back perplexed for a moment, and then said—

"Devil take you, Anton Nikolaevich; you are too nimble for me. But have a care! One of these days one of that rapacious tribe of inspectors or *ispravniki* will find you with a king salmon before the nets are up, and will confiscate your hut."

At this moment we heard a strange voice call "Good-evening, gentlemen," and looking round, we saw, standing in the doorway smiling grimly, Lavroff, *ispravnik* of Bolsheretsk.

The Grand Shaman's eyes protruded till I began to be afraid they would push his glasses off. Never have I seen such eyes, and never, I believe, was magician so taken aback. Vishnevsky, on the other hand, seemed to enjoy the situation immensely.

"Welcome to you, Gleb Mihailovich!" he cried. "This is excellent! You are just in time to have some fish. Sit down and join us."

Lavroff, however, remained standing, and eyed the great head severely.

"Where did you catch that fish?" he asked.

Vishnevsky smiled brazenly, and replied—

"Oh, in the sea, of course; Rufus caught it."

Rufus, hearing his name, looked up from his place by his master's side, and Vishnevsky patted him and said "Clever old dog." Lavroff's next question was—

"And may I ask what this gentleman is doing here in this extraordinary attire?" indicating Solovieff, on whom, to judge by his distressed expression, the responsibilities of the St Petersburg directorate were again beginning to descend.

"Oh, pardon me!" said Vishnevsky quickly. "I forgot to introduce you; the Grand Shaman of the Chukchees—the *Ispravnik* of Bolsheretsk."

Lavroff smiled slightly under his moustache, and Solovieff hastened to offer some explanations.

"You see, I got wet in the sea," he began.

"Helping Rufus to catch king salmon, I suppose," suggested Lavroff with an indulgent smile. "What an interesting picture!"

"No, ten thousand devils! Certainly not!" Solovieff shouted in indignation, thumping the table with his fist and shaking his glasses awry with the shock. "That fellow"—indicating Vishnevsky—"pushed me in. As for that fish," he went on, with a remarkable effort of mendacious courage, "would it satisfy your official mind if I were to inform you

that it was caught at Borisovsky's concession and presented to Anton Nikolaevich in acknowledgment of his hospitality in entertaining me here?"

"My dear sir, your explanation puts the matter quite on a correct basis," replied Lavroff readily, whereupon he bowed courteously to Solovieff and Vishnevsky in token that the question was closed, and proceeded to take a seat.

"What I am still wondering," he went on, after accepting a plate of fish from our host, "is why you don't wear your own Christian clothes instead of arraying yourself in blankets."

"Well, you see," explained Solovieff, "our own things for some reason failed to arrive, so our resourceful friend Anton Nikolaevich very kindly found these for me."

"But how can that be?" said Lavroff, setting down his knife and fork in wonderment. "I personally saw your bags and guns sent off by the launch, and the man was back before four o'clock to report having delivered them. Moreover, when I came in just now I tripped over a bag with 'L. K. S.' on it. Surely that must be yours?"

Solovieff turned an accusing eye at Vishnevsky.

"Anton Nikolaevich," he said sternly, "is it a fact that my bag was there all the time?"

"Perhaps it was, perhaps it was," admitted Vishnevsky, smiling blandly. "It just happened that I didn't find it, I suppose. But if I *had*, mark you, we would have had no Grand Shaman; and that, you will surely admit, would have been a great pity."

Solovieff's glasses jerked themselves more aslant than ever, and the two horns of his headgear seemed to bristle with indignant fury.

"You perfidious animal!" he snorted. "Ah, but this calls for some retribution. Gleb Mihailovich," he said, turning to Lavroff, "I am afraid I have misled you regarding that fish. The truth is that——"

"Enough!" interrupted the *ispravnik*, raising a hand in admonishment—the other hand, as it happened, was just conveying his first bite of fish to his mouth. "It is recorded in my official memory that that fish was legitimately caught at your own river concession. You yourself made that statement, and I cannot allow it to be altered. Moreover," he continued a trifle plaintively, "were you now to tell me otherwise you would deprive me of the pleasure of eating some of it; and that, I protest, would be unkind."

What could be done against an argument like that? Solovieff stared at him for a moment, then resignedly straightened his glasses, pulled off his head scarf, and settled down to eat. And from that point peace reigned—peace, and yet a little more vodka.

So I think we will leave the

evening there. Not that it ended there; but I do not think that its further course would interest you; also, I should be hypocritical were I to pretend that my recollection of it is crystal clear. One thing for which I can vouch, however, is that the king salmon head was excellent. What one eats is the gelatinous meat around the skull, which has a suggestion of calf's head and pig's trotters, but is vastly more delicate both in texture and flavour. And, strange to say, it holds no remote resemblance to fish.

Next morning I woke fairly early, having found the floor uncomfortably hard. For, in accordance with the custom of the country, there being only one bed, three of us had been accommodated on bear-skins on the floor—namely, Vishnevsky, Lavroff, and myself—Vishnevsky, perfect host that he was, having insisted on Solovieff's occupying the bed. Rufus, as was apparently his habit, slept under it. On awakening, I found Lavroff already getting up, so I followed suit and was shortly joined by Rufus. Vishnevsky, finding two men and a dog more or less walking about on him, had perforce to get up too; and as it was obviously intolerable that we should have to see Solovieff comfortably asleep while we were dragging ourselves about we pulled him out, with the result that by half-past eight we were having breakfast. As I have already indicated that the Grand Shaman's first prophecy was fully carried out, there is no need for me to attempt any description of how we felt. And if the vodka bottle *did* reappear on the breakfast table let me remind you that drinking is an ancient pastime, and that it is therefore not surprising if drinkers should still have faith in simple old-time remedies, such as "a hair of the dog that bit him." However, once fully awake and properly refuelled, not even the fulfilment of the Shaman's prophecy could rob us of a realistic afterglow of yesterday's exhilaration; and amid this mirage of enthusiasm we solemnly pledged ourselves to bring about the realisation of his second prediction by sallying forth at once upon the river, and carrying out such a holocaust of ducks as had never been known upon the Bolshaya. Lavroff had told us that the motor-boat would come at about nine o'clock to await Solovieff's orders, so the programme decided on was that we should convey Lavroff back in it to his headquarters at Haikovipât, slaughtering ducks on the way, and, after a light lunch there, return at our leisure in the afternoon. Rufus would accompany us to retrieve such of the birds as the launch would hold, and Ah Fat would come also to look after them; and very shortly after nine o'clock this carefully organised slaying party set forth.

The launch was a half-decked

boat with a large cockpit. Ah Fat established himself on the decking forward as a look-out, with Rufus lying close by him. Vishnevsky and I got pipes going and enjoyed the balmy morning air, for it was a beautiful sunny day. Solovieff, perhaps with a view to obliterating recollections of the Grand Shaman and resuscitating the director of Borisovsky's, engaged Lavroff in a serious conversation about the country, beginning with an inquiry as to the present population of his police district, and leading thence to a discussion of the serious depopulation of the country, and its causes; to talk of Bolsheretsk's historical past; of the old *ostrog* [1] of two hundred years ago; the insurrection of Danilo Anziforof, who for over a year had his headquarters there; the brutalities of the old Cossacks; and they were just getting into a heated argument as to the truth or otherwise of Deshnef's claim to have sailed out of the Arctic through the Bering Strait in 1648—eighty years before Bering himself reached it,—when suddenly Ah Fat was heard to call "*Ootka!*" which is the Russian for "duck."

Just why that should have taken three such determined hunters so much by surprise I do not know; but Solovieff looked up and said: "Eh, what's that?" I tried to remember where I had put my gun, and Vishnevsky wanted to know who the devil was sitting on his cartridges. Meanwhile the finest flight of ducks we saw that day was sailing serenely past us and got safely out of range. The opening of the holocaust was inevitably postponed; and Vishnevsky—as if he had been any better than the rest of us—commenced to rail at us again for "confusing our objectives." Were we, he asked, a bunch of sportsmen, or party of touring professors? Had we come out to shoot birds, or to improve our minds? Did we expect the ducks to come and perch on the boat for us to knock them over, or were we——

"*Ootka!*" said Ah Fat.

We all looked round sharply like a squad of recruits doing "eyes left," and saw a solitary unsuspecting duck flying straight towards us. Stung to determination, I suppose, by Vishnevsky's taunts, Solovieff and I whipped our guns up as Vishnevsky raised his, and all three fired together, and the unfortunate bird received a broadside of heavy shot that carried it several yards out of its path of flight, and blasted a great cloud of feathers out of it, amongst which, I firmly believe, its head and feet also went, but in the interests of accuracy I will not vouch for this. In any case, I was much surprised that when it struck the water it did not sink, in view of the amount of lead it

[1] Stockaded fort.

must have carried. In fact, it would have been much better for us if it had done so, for Rufus had great difficulty to bear the sight of it floating swiftly past us down the stream without going after it, and whined and pawed impatiently over the side of the boat until his forefeet slipped and he fell in. The poor old dog seemed so surprised that at first he evidently had difficulty in deciding whether to go after the bird or come back to us; but the strength of the current soon alarmed him, and hearing his master call, he willingly set himself to try and return to the boat. This, however, was not so easy, as although our engine had been stopped, it was some moments before the boat lost her way, and by that time poor old Rufus had been carried several lengths away from us. Every one was so occupied watching the dog, and so busy making suggestions, that we had nearly drifted into the bank before Vishnevsky noticed it. He called to Solovieff, who was nearest that side, to stave her off, and Solovieff, in his excitement and not seeing a boat-hook handy, took a wild thrust at the bank with the muzzle of his gun and just pushed us free.

"You'd better have a look at your gun," I said to him.

"*Ootka*!" said Ah Fat.

Instinctively we all looked round, and saw four ducks flying past us. Up went Solovieff's gun. To say that he fired would be to give you a tame idea of what happened. He pulled the trigger, whereupon his gun emitted a deafening roar and a blinding sheet of flame. At the same time the boat, having no one watching its course, struck the bank with a jolt, and Solovieff fell backwards into the cockpit, holding aloft a gun that seemed, like Tannhäuser's staff, to have sprouted twigs around its extremity.

I caught the gun as he fell. Of course, the barrel had exploded, having got mud into it from the bank, and the "twigs" were the two ribs, that were bent gracefully backwards like palm fronds. Poor old Solovieff! I hoped he wasn't hurt; but what with the flurry of keeping the boat from grounding, and then of retrieving Rufus, who fortunately had also found the bank, and returned to us along it on foot, I'm afraid he got rather overlooked. Rufus, however, revived him, and thus put us out of anxiety, by standing straddled across him in such a way that most of the water that was streaming off his body went down Solovieff's neck. The briskness with which Solovieff wriggled away, and the outburst of language that he directed at Rufus, could not have been achieved by any man who was seriously damaged. Rufus, being a polite home-bred Irishman, was friendly and apologetic. He was a nice-mannered dog, and I always thought he showed a gentlemanly restraint in the way he

accepted the foreignisation of his name into "Roofoos"; but, being a dog of spirit, I fear that if he could have seen how they spelt it—namely, "Руфусъ," his righteous indignation might have driven him to forget his good-breeding far enough to bite a few of them rather badly.

I'm afraid the accident to Solovieff's gun, and the incident with Rufus, and the boat fouling the bank, had the effect of rather damping our interest in shooting after that, so the threatened holocaust was limited to one bird. There is no doubt, however, that that one was very effectively shot. Ah Fat somewhat plaintively asked if we were not going back to look for it, so that he could cook it for dinner; but his master replied that it would be inedible, except to an ostrich, with all that lead in it, and that the only feasible way of removing the lead would be to smelt it out, which would be liable to render the bird uninteresting as a culinary proposition, so we had better abandon it. This was strongly supported by Lavroff, who claimed that his duties required that he should get back to headquarters as quickly as possible, so, with an atmosphere somewhat akin to depression upon us, we settled down to make the best speed we could to Haikovipât. As nothing eventful happened on the way, I will take you there with even greater expedition, and consider that we are now arriving.

Haikovipât lies at the end of a long and very pretty reach on the northern side of the broads. The land there is a good deal higher, though not to the extent of being hilly, and is fairly well wooded with stunted birch and other small trees. The hamlet itself lay in a little grassy hollow, and consisted of four very small Kamchadal log huts still in occupation, about the same number of deserted ones in an advanced state of dilapidation, and a couple of deserted *yourts*, which are a primitive type of dwelling, partly below and partly above ground, with the upper portion covered over with earth. The huts were roofed with thatch, which was hung over with old fishing-nets to hold it together; and as the neighbourhood produces nothing but stunted trees, a long straight log is practically unobtainable, so they had had to build their huts as best they could with twisted ones, and in this they had succeeded very cleverly, thereby giving their village, however, a quaint "wavy" appearance, as if looked at through a bad pane of glass. Scattered around the houses were the inevitable sleigh dogs, and quite a number of white goats.

On the rising ground to the right of the village were the Government buildings — two large wooden bungalows— which formed Lavroff's headquarters, the one being the terminal office of the telephone line to Petropavlovsk, and the

other a residence intended for the *ispravnik*. To the former of these Lavroff took us.

I would like to say here that the only two Russian officials with whom I came much into contact—namely, Lavroff, the *ispravnik*, and Murmansky, the fishery inspector—struck me as efficient, conscientious, and hard-working men, but one could not help feeling, on seeing these Government buildings, that there must have been some rottenness higher up. Although only built of logs—good, long, straight imported ones,—they were designed on a most generous plan, and with a sound eye also to architectural effect. The telephone bungalow, which was entered through an elaborate glassed porch, must have contained at least eight rooms, all very lofty, and equipped with large brick heating ovens in the Russian style, built in at the corners. The elaborate manner in which these were finished suggested that it had been intended to give the bungalow a really handsome and comfortable interior, and the way in which the gaily painted window and door-frames projected from the walls seemed to show that the latter were meant to be covered with plaster. As it was, however, it would appear that work had been abandoned as soon as they had constructed the bare shell of the house and the stoves to make it habitable. The walls had been left with nothing to hide the bare logs and their moss filling, and in all this many-roomed building there was not a stick or rag of anything that merited the name of furniture. Boards placed across trestles served as beds, and there were a few rough locally made tables, benches, and chairs. Carpets, curtains, and bedding were entirely absent; for the latter the inmates used fur skins. One would imagine that even the supply of household crockery and cutlery had been neglected, for all the lunch that was offered to us was a large quantity of boiled eggs, which were placed on the table in a bowl, and which, for lack of plates, spoons, or any other facilities, we had perforce to eat out of our hands. And we were told that these houses had taken six years to build, and had cost a fabulous amount of money!

However, I have already indicated that Russians are "whole-hoggers" in the matter of roughing it, so that this sort of thing, even if it arouses comment, seldom seems to cause surprise. As for protest, I suppose that is considered futile from the start, and even dangerous, and so is never attempted. So we made ourselves as comfortable as we might in this dismal empty barn of a place, and did the best we could with the task of eating soft-boiled eggs straight out of the shells. I won't say that our best was particularly good; but at least, when one met a very soft egg, it made

one feel that it was perhaps just as well after all that they hadn't a carpet.

While we were engaged in this species of legerdemain, Lavroff, who had excused himself for a while to attend to his duties, rejoined us and asked if any one had any telegrams to send off. This alone would have ruined their carpet, for Solovieff received such a stab of conscience that he dropped his egg—a particularly plastic one. Of *course* he had a telegram to send off—the Skipper's; but—but—it had been in his pocket when he got doused in the sea, and where and—compassionate saints!—in what condition would it be now? But he had reckoned without Ah Fat, who, in drying his clothes, had had the intelligence to take all the contents out of his pockets and dry them separately, subsequently replacing them; so that when Solovieff felt in his pockets he in due course found the Skipper's memorandum, all dry and crisp. Relief illumined his features, only to be extinguished as soon as he unfolded the paper. For the telegram had been drafted in indelible pencil, and, having been thoroughly soaked with seawater, the writing had blotted in such a way as to make a large number of the words entirely illegible.

"Well, may I sink through the earth if I can make anything of that!" he said, after scanning it for a few minutes in deep perplexity. Then he threw it across to Vishnevsky, asking him, as a man of resource, to see what he could make of it.

Vishnevsky flattened it out on the table and studied it. Roughly translated, its legible portions ran something like this:—

Peter - - - - R - - - - - - - - - completed exceptionally quick - - - - - - - - - Ivan - - - - splendid - - - - very - - - - - - - - - -

"Well, now, in the first place," said Vishnevsky, getting down to business immediately, "I suppose Borisovsky's have a telegraphic address in St Petersburg. What is it?"

"*Riba*," replied Solovieff promptly. *Riba*, I may say, is the Russian for "fish." I might also explain that in Russia it is customary to put the name of the town first in addressing letters and telegrams.

"Excellent," said Vishnevsky, "then the first two words are obviously '*Peterburg Riba*,' so at least we have the address disposed of. Well, now you know that it is a telegram to your head office, does that make it any easier to you?"

Solovieff struggled with it for a while but confessed finally that it did not.

"Devil take the man!" said Vishnevsky impatiently. "Have you no imagination? Surely, as a director of the great Borisovsky's, that is required of you? Imagination to con-

ceive, courage to carry out—there, my boy, you have, in a nutshell, the ingredients of success. Now, since yesterday afternoon I feel that I have imagination and courage in great quantities, and if you wish *me* to deal with this for you I will make you a telegram that will stir your co-directors to their innermost hearts. But we must hurry, my friend, for Gleb Mihailovich has work to do and wants to be rid of us."

Solovieff consenting, with a mixed air of hopefulness and misgiving, Vishnevsky then went on to suggest that, as we had come up for a priest to perform the benediction of the canning factory he might take it that the work of erection was practically completed. This was confirmed. Then he turned to me and asked how the time taken compared with the time in which the Japanese had erected their cannery on the neighbouring concession last year. I replied that, assuming that we found our cannery completed on our return, it would have been done in three weeks with eighty men, as against the Japanese taking six weeks with nearly two hundred men. This filled him with great enthusiasm, and he immediately started off scribbling at a rapid pace on the lower half of the sheet on which the Skipper's telegram was drafted. This is what he finally produced :—

Factory building completed. Exceptionally quick and excellent work thanks to Ivan Alexandrovich's splendid and resourceful management. Very creditable achievement.

"Now all that it wants is your signature," he said, handing the paper to Solovieff with an air of generous self-satisfaction.

"Eh! My signature? Why?" asked Solovieff, who didn't seem to share Vishnevsky's expansive ease of mind about the message. "How do you know he was referring to the factory anyway, and why doesn't Ivan Alexandrovich sign it himself?"

"Well, now, by all the saints in Paradise! Is there anything *else* that he has just completed? No. Well, *obviously* he means the factory. As for signing it himself—well, my dear fellow, with a director on the spot, who but that director should sign telegraphic reports to head office? You will see that he has not put his own name to the telegram, for the last word is a very short one. Well, doesn't it occur to you that this pencilled draft was meant to be just a suggestion of what *you* might send? That our dear wily friend Vanya,[1] having a director at his concession for the one time of his life, is merely wishing to prompt that director as to how he might do him a good turn? Think of it—your factory built in

[1] Ivan.

half the time taken by the Japanese, and with less than half the men. Doesn't he deserve a little credit at headquarters?"

"By St Peter, you're right!" cried Solovieff with sudden enthusiasm, thumping the table so that the remaining eggs nearly leapt out of the bowl. "Let me see that telegram again. Excellent! Of course he can't have meant anything else. This shall be our joint effort on the dear fellow's behalf. Give me the pencil."

He signed the message with a careful flourish as if he expected the actual signature to be despatched; and shortly afterwards we took leave of Lavroff and started on our return journey. Travelling with the swift current, this was very quickly accomplished, and we reached Vishnevsky's concession early in the afternoon. The trip was without incident, the ducks presumably being all asleep in the midday warmth—and, anyway, if they weren't we were, most of the way.

We spent that night very quietly at Vishnevsky's, and walked back to Borisovsky's in the morning, calling at the two intervening Japanese concessions on the way. At the second, old Tsujimura, who was of *samurai* stock, gave us tea made in the old-time manner, and then, with great ceremony and pride, showed us his collection of sword-blades, each of them several hundred years old and signed by some famous sword-smith.

During that afternoon the Kamchadal priest arrived, with his acolyte, in Lavroff's canoe, which was a dug-out about twenty-five feet long by two feet broad, poled by two Kamchadals. During the summer this was the sole conveyance provided to the *ispravnik* for visiting the extremely wide area under his administration, and in this dug-out he had been as far as forty miles down the open coast. The priest was a small and not impressively cleanly man with long black hair and beard, dressed in a gown of red brocade surmounted by an ordinary soft felt hat, black and somewhat greasy. Both hat and gown looked as if they had been not infrequently slept in. Cleanliness, they say, is next to godliness, but in that primitive land the distances between are apt to be considerable.

During the afternoon Vishnevsky arrived, having been prevailed upon by us to come with us to Ozernoi to witness the benediction of the cannery. Later on a Japanese appeared who also wished to get a passage to Ozernoi. The intention was that we should leave that evening, but there was a fresh off-sea breeze, and the sea was breaking on the beach in such huge combers that embarkation would have been extremely hazardous, if not impossible, so our departure was postponed till next morn-

ing. This brought up the problem of putting up all this party for the night. On a Japanese concession this would not have involved much difficulty, as they always have separate sleeping quarters floored with *tatami*, or thick mats. Here, however, the entire accommodation appeared to consist of one room, in which the local managers lived and slept. It had a plain board floor on which everybody walked about in their dirty boots, whatever the weather, and there were no signs that it was ever swept; but that floor was the only sleeping accommodation that they had to offer us. Well, there it was, and we had to make the best of it; but the trouble was to provide bedding, which several of us were without, including Solovieff and myself, who had intended to sleep on the *Chaika*. Finally a meagre supply of untanned skins was unearthed and distributed. Solovieff insisted on seeing first that Vishnevsky and the Japanese were comfortably equipped, and this left just one bearskin and a reindeer-skin over for himself and me. As the latter have short hard hair, and are not much good as an emollient for a hard floor, we shared this outfit together, using the bearskin as a mattress, and pulling the reindeer-skin over us as a blanket; in addition to which, as the nights were still cold, everyone turned in pretty well fully dressed. It was a rather motley assembly. On his bunk at the far end of the room was the assistant manager, a Russian; then, on the floor, came Solovieff, a Russian-Finn; myself, British; the Kamchadal priest and his acolyte; then the Japanese; and finally, near the door, Vishnevsky, a Pole—to say nothing of Rufus, an Irishman, who slept under the assistant manager's bed. Personally, I confess I found sleep extremely elusive. Apart from the hardness of the floor, untanned skins are not the most attractive things to sleep on. Firstly, they have a characteristic odour, which does not suggest a perfumed couch; then, being hard, they crackle whenever you move. To make matters worse, the Japanese started snoring. I understand that, according to the Japanese custom, a man can return his wife to her parents if he finds that she snores, and Japanese girls are carefully trained to sleep silently for this reason. Unfortunately, however, this arrangement does not operate reciprocally, and the men, therefore, are able to snore with impunity, and many of them take immoderate advantage of this license. Ours was fairly revelling in it, until a reverberating Slavonic curse from his neighbour, Vishnevsky, caused him to start up in his sleep, and from that time we had peace—from him. But unfortunately there were to be other disturbing factors. Somewhere in the dead of night a dog barked outside. Immediately Rufus was up and,

galloping over all our prostrate bodies, dashed out through the door, which had been left ajar. For a few moments there was silence. Then, having apparently settled the disturbance, and being a sociable dog, he brought two or three friends home to play. For about a quarter of an hour the party of them growled, whined, and barked at each other just outside the door, until Vishnevsky, hearing me start to get up, went himself to the door and ordered Rufus in. But Rufus was having much too good a time, thank you, and refused to come in, so his irate master finally drove the whole bunch of them away and closed the door. Then we had peace again—for about ten minutes. By that time Rufus, finding it perhaps a bit cold outside, had parted with his friends and returned to the door, and, finding it shut, barked for admission. But his stern master was not going to be at his dog's beck and call, so, by way of punishment, let him stay out in the cold for a while. So the faithful Rufus just stayed there and barked patiently and incessantly for about half an hour, until all of us were thoroughly awake, and several of us began to sit up, muttering things. So at last the unfortunate Vishnevsky emerged out of his warm skins again and went to open the door, holding his right hand upraised as he did so in order to fetch the dog a good cuff as he passed. But the door was hardly open before Rufus thrust through it like a dark streak, and, pounding over our bodies again, curled himself up swiftly under the bed and relapsed into dead silence. As Vishnevsky couldn't very well climb over us after him, he had no option but to leave him unpunished and return to his skins and try to get warm again: so, altogether, I think that Rufus was one up on his master over that evening's outing. I believe some of us got some sleep after that.

By next morning the wind had fortunately subsided, and we were aboard the *Chaika* by seven-thirty. We didn't, for some reason, get off till nearly nine, and then anchored off the river mouth for some hours to take fresh water, finally starting for Ozernoi towards mid-day. The day being overcast we could see little of the land beyond the flat coastline, and now and then the bases of some mountains, still streaked with snow. Even on the beach there was snow in places. We saw many Japanese schooners, a large number of which come up to these waters to troll for cod: at one time I counted sixteen of them.

We reached Ozernoi about six-thirty, and were met on the beach by the Skipper, accompanied by his wife, who had arrived at the concession shortly before our departure. Of course Vishnevsky had a great kissing bout with the Skipper—which, however, was not extended to his wife,—and

in due course we proceeded towards the mess hut for supper. As we were getting into the boat to be ferried across the river Stefân came up and reported that one of the men, who had apparently been ill for some time, had just died.

"Well, well! Poor fellow!" said the Skipper with a look of genuine concern, which, however, almost immediately changed to his normal business-like expression as he added: "However, that all fits in very conveniently."

"What do you mean?" asked Solovieff, aghast at this apparent cold-bloodedness. "Didn't he say the man was dead?"

"Yes, yes," said the Skipper, with just a touch of conscience in his face, "and I'm very sorry for the poor chap, of *course*. But he was going to die anyway, and meanwhile if I didn't find something to keep that Kamchadal priest sober to-night we would have had him so drunk by to-morrow morning he wouldn't be able to do the benediction of the cannery for us, and your trip would have been wasted. Whereas now he can go and bury that man after dinner. That will keep him sober and give the man the benefit of a Christian burial, and we will get our ceremony performed properly to-morrow, and so every one will be happy. After that he can go and get as full as an egg for all I care—and you can be sure he will."

And so it was arranged.

While we were sitting talking in the Skipper's room after supper his wife suddenly asked Solovieff if he had despatched her telegram. Solovieff looked at her in blank surprise for a moment.

"But I had no telegram from you, Olga Petrovna," he said at last.

"Oh, but surely," she returned. "Vanya, didn't you give Leonti Kirilovich my telegram before he left?"

"Certainly," replied the Skipper, turning to Solovieff. "I came aboard the *Chaika* after supper, and handed it to you myself in an envelope. You must remember that."

"But——" said Solovieff, with apprehension of disaster spreading across his features, "but that was a telegram to our St Petersburg office. You gave me no other."

"What's the man talking about?" said the Skipper impatiently. "I gave you one telegram only, and that was to my wife's father in Riga."

Vishnevsky's eyebrows and shoulders went up simultaneously, and he put his hand to his mouth to restrain an explosion which seemed imminent. Solovieff looked more mystified and apprehensive than ever, so finally the Skipper went to his table and, after a short search amongst his papers, produced a slip, which he handed to him.

"Here," he said, "that's a copy of it. Perhaps that will remind you."

Solovieff took it, and as he read it an expression of horror came upon his face. "The devil!" he gasped, clasping his brow with one hand, and instinctively holding the slip of paper out to Vishnevsky, his accomplice, with the other. Vishnevsky read it with gradually ascending brows. Then when he looked across at Solovieff's woebegone countenance, his whimsical nature got control, and he sat back and burst out laughing.

This is the message that was written on the slip:—

Peterkopf Riga.

Voyage safely completed exceptionally quick smooth seapassage Ivan's health splendid house very comfortable kisses Olga.

The Skipper and his wife waited with sympathetic patience until Vishnevsky's merriment had subsided somewhat, when explanations were asked, and given, with much profuse apology to Olga Petrovna for the miscarriage of her message. The original telegram had "got wet"; they had endeavoured to reconstruct it, and at the same time to do a good turn to Ivan Alexandrovich, and this was what they had ultimately sent off, and they showed him their draft. It was now the Skipper's turn to raise his eyebrows, and when he had finished reading he gave vent to a most extraordinary string of Russian expletives in which I believe saints, devils, and dog's blood were all mentioned. The only part of it all that was really intelligible to me, however, was his concluding assumption that we must have had a *very* wild time the night before. But there was no getting round the fact that the message that had been sent off over Solovieff's signature was very flattering to him, which point Vishnevsky did not neglect to stress. In fact, after undertaking personally to take and despatch Olga Petrovna's correct telegram on his return to Bolsheretsk, he proceeded to ask the Skipper what commission he and Solovieff were going to get when the directors raised his salary as a result of the pæan of praise they had telegraphed; to which the Skipper generously replied that he would stand them a dinner of pheasant in cream at the "*Zolotoi Rog*"[1] in Vladivostock, accompanied by as much champagne as they found themselves able to consume.

"By the way," he added, turning to me, as if the pheasant had reminded him of it, "did you make him give you some of that Swedish roast duck I told you about?"

"Well, no," I said, "he didn't, but it wasn't really his fault. You see, we were too busy most of the time to do much shooting, and when we did we shot so well that all the

[1] The "Golden Horn"—a restaurant.

duck we hit was blown to pieces."

. . . . . .

There was, strange to say, a sequel many years later to the part of this narration that has reference to roast duck, which it might interest you to hear. To tell it, however, I must ask you to leave Kamchatka for the time, and jump with me over the years of the war, alighting in Japan, whither, after the armistice, I had returned to resume the pursuit of the nimble *yen*. My headquarters were in Tokyo, but I had come down to Yokohama for a couple of days towards the end of September, and was walking round to the club the first evening when, just in front of Wright's Hotel, to my great surprise and delight, I met the Skipper, all dressed up in town clothes and a bowler hat, and actually shaved, but still the unmistakable six feet three of Ivan Alexandrovich.

The pleasure was clearly mutual. He seized my hand and clapped me on the shoulder, and proceeded to ask me about the war, and how I had fared, and so forth. In the midst of this he stopped and suggested that as he had to meet a friend in Wright's Hotel shortly I might come in and join him in a drink, and yarn about old times until his friend came. Having no other engagements, I agreed, so we went into the billiard-room, where, with whisky-sodas at our elbows, we sat and yarned, at first about the war, then about Kamchatka and our old companions there—Blake and Williams and their "Hotel de Tongas," Solovieff, Brashkoff and Vishnevsky, even Vishnevsky's roast duck that I never got—until the Skipper's friend arrived. This turned out to be Captain Bullcott, a local pilot who had a Scandinavian wife, and whom I knew slightly. Bullcott was in a very cheery mood, and insisted that, as it was still much too early to go up to dinner, we must have a drink with him. We did; and then, of course, we each returned the compliment, and we were all getting exceedingly friendly and convivial, when the Skipper suddenly banged the table and said—

"By jingo! You never got any of Vishnevsky's roast duck, did you? Well, now, that is just what Bullcott here is going to give me to-night—the real Swedish thing! I tell you, man, his wife is a *won*derful cook. Look here, Bullcott——"

Fortunately he did not have to go any further with his rather brazen suggestion that his friend should invite me to dinner, for Bullcott immediately interrupted him by saying that, of course, I must come too; and as he was extremely insistent, and as the Skipper, too, was begging me not to spoil our chance meeting by breaking up the party, I accepted. So it was decided that we would have "just one more" and then go.

We had successfully dealt

with this "one more," and were on the point of leaving, when Bullcott suddenly shouted a delighted welcome towards the door, and raised his hands in boisterous greeting. I looked round, and saw, just entering, a wild Irishman named Reilly—a popular Yokohama character and skipper in a well-known Japanese steamship line—with a friend. I had known Reilly for years, and had last met him in France as a naval transport officer, while Bullcott and he, who were apparently great friends, had also not met since the war; so as Reilly was in at least as cheerful a mood as ourselves, there was much jubilation at the meeting. Reilly said that such an auspicious occasion required special treatment, and he personally was prepared to drink a tumbler of neat whisky to our united healths and then eat the glass, which, knowing him as I did, I had no doubt but that he would have done. However, we adopted a slightly more moderate course, and after Bullcott had insisted and got it agreed that Reilly and his friend should join the duck-eating party, we had a round of cocktails from Reilly on the strength of his meeting us, and a round from each of us on the strength of our meeting him, and, I believe, a round from the Skipper and Reilly's friend just to get square; and then Bullcott suggested large-heartedly that we should "move along." So we started to move, all of us by this time being in very high spirits, while Reilly and his friend could have faced a snow-storm with equanimity.

At this point I noticed the appalling fact that it was after half-past nine, whereas the usual hour for dining in Yokohama is eight. I accordingly urged that we could not possibly spring all this party on Mrs Bullcott at this hour, and suggested, therefore, that the Captain should send a note up to her to say he was not coming, and that we should all dine together down town. This proposal was received with general acclamation except from Bullcott, who insisted on treating it with deep scorn. Think of the duck that his wife had taken the trouble to cook for us herself; she would be most offended if we didn't come and eat it. As for our being rather numerous, well, all the better—his wife was fond of company about the house, and was always delighted to entertain his friends. We must not disappoint her. So, with a certain amount of misgiving on the part of some of us, I think, we filed into rickshas and headed for the Bluff.

The Captain's house was situated just at the top of the hill, standing back in a little garden. Reilly fortunately had an electric torch and lit our way up the stone steps and across the path. It was then nearly ten o'clock, and somehow the house seemed to me in an ominous darkness. The Captain rang. There was no

answer. He rang again—two or three times; the house remained in deathly silence, through which one began to hear an uneasy shuffling of feet amongst our party. Then he took out his key and tried to put it in the lock, but something seemed to get in his way, so he asked Reilly to turn his torch on. Reilly accordingly produced his torch and directed a shaft of light at the door. And there, in the circle of illumination that resulted, we saw a space of green-painted door with a bright brass door-knob, and over the door-knob was looped a piece of string, and hanging to that string by one leg was a very fine fat roast duck, with a little folded slip of paper tucked neatly under its left wing. Amid an awed silence the Captain reached out a trembling hand and withdrew the note; and as he unfolded it in the light of Reilly's torch we all crowded round to see. And this is what we read:—

> *I suppose you are with some drunken friends again. Don't you dare to bring them in here. Here is your roast duck. I have bolted the house and gone to bed.*

I concluded that fate was against my eating Swedish roast duck.

MUSINGS WITHOUT METHOD.

THE LAST REFORM BILL—WHY EDUCATE THE VOTERS?—OUR GREAT LIBRARIES—THE CRIME OF MOVING THEM—THE BODLEIAN LIBRARY—WHAT THOMAS BODLEY ACHIEVED—THE BOLSHEVIKS' LATEST MANIFESTO—A PROGRAMME FOR COMMUNISTS.

THE last Bill to extend the franchise that is ever likely to be introduced into England has been passed in the silence of levity or indifference. Though nobody seemed to want it, it was accepted with scarce a hint of opposition. No agitation preceded its passage. Not even a single church was set fire to as a proof that the young women of England were willing and ready to take part in the government of their country. No ladies, loud of voice and deficient in humour, manacled themselves to iron palings, that the whole world might acknowledge their competence in politics. Those who supported the measure supported it half-heartedly. The more genuine opposition was not taken seriously. Lord Birkenhead, introducing the Bill in the House of Lords, made no secret of his profound disapproval of it, and he may be taken as the mouthpiece of the people of England. The people of England apathetically acquiesced in the passing of a Bill which it did not want, and upon which it had never been consulted. That is how in a top-heavy unlimited democracy the people's will prevails. If the people has a will, it has no chance of making it heard, and the policy which it pretends to direct is shaped for it by a tyrannical committee.

Why the Government pushed the Bill through expeditiously is not clear. We have no faith in their plea that they were bound in honour to give women of twenty-one the vote because somebody once gave a pledge to somebody else. If this excuse were valid, then the British Empire might be abolished overnight and unawares. There is no one so powerful that his mere pledge may bind the House of Commons, and the House of Commons itself cannot, without discussion, bind the country. We may conclude only that the House of Commons and the country are bored with the franchise. There are so many voters on the roll already that another five million can make no difference. Henceforth "let 'em all come" shall be our motto. When the last man and the last woman may face the ballot-box, with marked paper in hand, there is an end of discussion, and the politicians, who appear to believe that to submit to clamour is true statesmanship, are content. And perhaps there lurks in the minds of some that there is safety in numbers.

The larger the electorate becomes, the feebler it becomes. With its size, the chance of accident and scandal increases. A vast crowd does not think; it is content to shout. And the English democracy, wide and deep as England herself, turns the business of government into a gamble. Henceforth we choose our governors by no surer means than did the Athenians, who elected theirs by lot. The toss of a coin is no less wise or certain than the majority of a constituency which amounts to many thousands. With the enfranchisement of the flappers the British Constitution, which has been held up to the admiration of the world for centuries, has come at last to an end. The final extension of democracy has killed what was known as a "free Government." The "Mother of Parliaments," now degenerated into a single chamber, elected by a vast mob, mostly indifferent and illiterate, has no longer any right to an honourable title. The members of the House of Commons do not represent the voters, who are too numerous and too remote for them to reach. Henceforth the "machine" will be omnipotent, and will control the crowd, which pretends to send its representatives to Parliament, as a slave-driver controls his slaves.

What will the newly enfranchised do with the ballot now that they are free to use it? They will do as they are told by the man with the loudest voice. The optimist tells us that the voters must be educated to discharge their important duty. They need no education. There is no man nor woman either so simple that he (or she) cannot put a cross upon a voting-paper. The profoundest student of political history carries no more weight at the poll, or marks his paper with a better understanding, than the newly enfranchised girl of twenty-one. The voters are given no choice of candidates. They are asked to do no more than support or reject one, selected by others, and probably unknown to them even by sight. It is almost impossible that they should have any knowledge of his opinions or his character. He comes before them wearing a label—Conservative, Liberal, or Labour,—and it needs no process of education to teach the young man or the young woman how to select their favourite label. It is right, no doubt, as Mr Baldwin says, "that Parliament should be kept sensitive to the will of the people, when it is expressed through responsible and constitutional channels." But when many millions go to the poll, you cannot pretend that they have any will, uniform and coherent, at all. If they think, which is seldom, they think of very different things. The young typist may be quite sure that she would like a new frock; the boy of twenty-one may desire, above all things, to see the hero of his fancy make a century. But how should either of them know whether

they are Socialists or individualists, or what steps they must take to secure their real freedom and make them "units in the State, and not mere tools?" In brief, it is the Goddess Chance which controls each stage in the business of making a House of Commons, and she will not be interfered with by such irrelevancies as education or intelligence.

The last Reform Bill differs from all others, as we have said, by the indifference with which it has been greeted. The first Reform Bill—it was passed in 1832,—which, as Mr Gladstone said, destroyed a perfect constitution, shook England to its foundations, and brought the country to the edge of civil war. It caused a dissolution of Parliament, and a threat to coerce the House of Lords by the creation of fifty peers. It called forth all the eloquence that there was in England, and the orators on either side were closely followed and eagerly acclaimed. As a sensation it was a formidable rival to the cholera itself. When in October 1831 the Lords rejected the Bill, after five days' debate, all the newspapers, save 'The Times' and 'The Morning Herald,' appeared in black. Nobody seemed to know what its consequences would be, and there was a general dissatisfaction in both camps. "When it comes into operation," wrote Charles Greville, a man of moderate counsels, "how disappointed everybody will be, and first of all the people! Their imaginations are raised to the highest pitch, but they will open their eyes very wide when they find no sort of advantage accruing to them, when they are deprived of much of the expense and more of the excitement of elections, and see a House of Commons constructed after their own hearts, which will probably be an assembly in all respects inferior to the present." Finally, a formidable riot at Bristol gave England a taste of what it imagined the French Revolution had been in its beginning. Its violence was ascribed by Greville to the effect of the Bill. "The spirit which produced these atrocities," he wrote, "was generated by reform; ... it was a premature outbreaking of the thirst for plunder and longing after havoc and destruction, which is the essence of Reform in the mind of the mob." Even the Reform Bill of 1867 was not passed without a vast deal of strife and agitation. It took many months to pass it through the Houses of Parliament, and while it was being discussed it absorbed the public interest. Its success was the triumph of Disraeli, and upon its acceptance he "climbed the greasy pole," as he said himself. In 1867 one million voters were added to the register. Our latest Reform Bill adds five million, and it has slunk into being without a tremor of excitement. We ask again what is the cause of this indifference? We have, it seems, lost the habit

of the fight. Resistance is now accounted too great a trouble, and it is easier to murmur the foolish formula, "it doesn't matter," than to risk a seat or even a vote at the next election. But by this apathy Parliament is fast losing the respect it once possessed. Those who will not fight for their principles will never arouse enthusiasm. Now that everybody has a vote, few will exercise it, and the House of Commons will descend in interest and importance to the level of a vestry or a Board of Guardians.

Our great public libraries are suffering from the same disease which afflicts our constituencies—the disease of numbers. Those few hopeless institutions, whose fate it is to harbour every book, every scrap of printed matter that comes to light, are suffering miserably from the mass of rubbish that overwhelms them. Their very existence is threatened. The high tide of trivial fiction and foolish theology threatens to carry away in its flood the masterpieces of the past, and even the noble buildings which contain them. The British Museum, the Bodleian, and the University Library at Cambridge have long been cemeteries of the entombed dead. To preserve vast masses of print and paper may be the duty of a vigilant government. It is not the proper duty of a learned library, which should surely be asked to exercise choice and discretion. And the question that is asked, and must be answered, is: how shall we protect the libraries of our two great Universities from the existing load of books which is year after year heaped upon them?

The British Museum, we fear, must still bear its burden. It discharges a duty that it owes to the nation, and until some method of censorship be invented, it must put away a specimen of everything that is published. Nor does it seem that any kind of censorship is easy. The wisest of contemporaries could not be trusted to decide which of the books of their time are worth saving. Shakespeare in his own age would have had no chance were he weighed in the scales of esteem against Ben Jonson. In the early nineteenth century, had one been taken and the others left, Byron would have had conferred upon him the right of immortality, while Keats and Shelley would have perished miserably. Sir Edmund Gosse some years ago pleaded for a general destruction of books. He regretted that the destruction of the Alexandria library was a fable. If there were no precedent, he would have a precedent created. Alas! the solution of this difficult problem is not so simple as that. Fire is a worse judge of books than the critics. We have no kind of guarantee that it would spare the masterpieces which should be preserved. It might, like the book-worm, disdain the common paper of

to-day, and prefer to destroy the fine ink and noble paper of the past.

Yet at Oxford and at Cambridge the necessity of action presses. Neither the Bodleian nor the University Library, once adequate for the housing of such books as a scholar might want, is wholly fit for the task, be it duty or privilege, of giving space to all the books which are no books, and are yet thrust upon them. Even if they proclaimed at this hour that they are libraries, not rubbish-heaps, it would be too late for salvation. Truly something must be done. Many remedies are proposed. Some there are who would remove these ancient libraries into the country, where they would have room to expand and so keep pace with the increasing rubble. This act of vandalism will, we believe, be presently performed by the University of Cambridge, if only the money be forthcoming. Others would burrow deeply beneath the existing buildings, to the danger of ancient walls and with the risk of digging down to a swamp. This is but a makeshift, and in a year or two the same difficulty would again confront the anxious librarian.

Now there is an objection, which to us seems irreparable, to moving an ancient library from the place where it has grown in usefulness. A library is a corporate thing, with a life and tradition of its own. To transplant it into the country is like dragging up an old tree by its roots. We have no certainty that it will survive and flourish elsewhere. Never can it keep, in its new surroundings, the value and the sentiment which once were its own. Fitted with all the modern appliances which save space and labour, it will have the appearance of one of Mr Carnegie's creations, which turn the art of reading into a common thing.

It is impossible, for instance, to think of the great library which bears Bodley's name apart from its history. Its record is unbroken. Ever since in an upper chamber in St Mary's Church, Bishop Cobham assembled what to-day we should regard as a few manuscripts for the use of scholars, there have been the makings of a University Library. The example in benefaction of Bishop Cobham was followed by Richard of Bury, the author of 'Philobiblon,' the eloquent scholar, who paid such a tribute to books as has never been paid since. "The masters who teach without flogging or fleecing," he called them, "without punishment or payment; as ears of corn, full of grain, to be rubbed only by apostolic hands; as golden pots of manna; as Noah's ark and Jacob's ladder, and Joshua's stones of testimony and Gideon's lamps and David's scrip." Yet even in his day the enemies of books were active, and Richard of Bury found in the monasteries of England precious volumes devoured by mice and worms

and given over to moths. Nor did Richard of Bury exhaust the wise munificence of scholars. Less than a century after him came the good Duke Humphrey, whose building, finished in 1480, still exists as a piece of the reading-room, secluded now, as it was then, *a strepitu saeculari*.

Of the generosity of Duke Humphrey and of those whom he encouraged much has been justly said in praise. He himself gave freely out of his abundance, and those who followed the new learning in Italy, such as John Tiptoft, patron of letters and the "butcher of England," added the treasures which they had gathered abroad. Then there followed a period of pillage. If Wood may be believed, the library was grievously despoiled. Manuscripts were stolen and burned, sold to tailors for their measures, and to bookbinders for their covers. And then came Thomas Bodley to stay the hand of the despoiler, and to bring order and beauty where ruin and destruction had held sway. The havoc was complete for some years before he entered Magdalen, and he had spent a long time in public service at home and abroad when he returned to the University and took up the work which has given him immortality. "I concluded at the last," says he, "to set up my staffe at the Librairie dore in Oxon; being thoroughly persuaded that, in my solitude and surcease from the commonwealth affayres, I could not busie myself to better purpose than by reducing that place (which then in every part laye ruined and wast) to the publique use of students." To what better toil could a retired diplomatist apply himself? Nor did he pause by the road. In 1597 he made a formal offer to the Vice-Chancellor. "Whereas," he wrote, "there hath been heretofore a public library in Oxford, which, you know, is apparant by the room itself remanying, and by your statute records, I will take the charge and cost upon me to reduce it again to its former use." There are few finer instances of a wise generosity than this, and Thomas Bodley was as good as his word. He began by fitting up the empty library with shelves and seats; he then set about persuading benefactors to contribute gifts of books; and presently conveyed to the library a farm at Cookham, and some tenements in Distaff Lane, London, that it might not lack a proper endowment. He went steadily on with the work, undaunted by the accidents which hamper the munificent. The fittings of the library cost more than he expected. "Bodley is looked for daily at Oxford," thus wrote Dudley Carleton to a friend; "his library costs him much more than he expected, because the timber work of the house was rotten, and had to be new made." Then the roof, which is still a wonder to the wise, was as costly as

it is beautiful. But all difficulties were at last triumphed over, and by 1600 Bodley was ready to gather the books which were generously given, and had provided a register, still existing, in which are enrolled the names of the benefactors. Henceforth the history of the Bodleian is a record of munificence, of fidelity to a great tradition, and not even the practical spirit of this age should avail to move a library, the creation of wise and generous men, from its original site.

The books which were first put upon the shelves of the Bodleian were books of choice. They did not find their place there merely because they were books, but because they were desirable. The democratic principle of accounting any scrap of printed matter or book worthy to be thrust upon the libraries of the Universities was first adopted in 1662, when the Stationers' Company was compelled by statute to deliver a copy of every book to Oxford and Cambridge. Henceforth just as to-day every man and every woman is a voter, so anything that was set up in type was adjudged worthy preservation. For a while the libraries exercised a certain criticism, and rejected such works as they deemed unnecessary to put upon the shelves. No doubt the libraries made mistakes. Cambridge, for instance, would have nothing to say to Byron's 'Siege of Corinth,' Peacock's 'Handley Hall,' and Scott's 'Antiquary.' This no doubt was very wrong of Cambridge, but the damage of these rejections seems trifling when we remember the dead weight of rubbish from which the power of selection saved her. And, after all, these recognised masterpieces might have been acquired later at a trifling cost. But in 1818 the Bodleian Library determined for the future to reject nothing. "Even the elementary works and worthless trifles," we are told, "that certainly do not need entering in the catalogue, were for many years so kept that access could be had to the stores at all times and examination made, while now everything alike is entered."

Thus the Bodleian Library, which began its career with a noble dignity, is forced to perform the office of a literary workhouse, where all vagrants may be housed. But it has reached the limit of its capacity; and though we cannot believe that it will be destroyed, in the desire to have all books under one roof, that the folios of Shakespeare, for instance, should not be separated from the stories of Mr Edgar Wallace, no plan yet proposed to find ample room for all rubbish is without danger. The University Library at Cambridge, though it cannot boast the august tradition of its Oxford rival, is not without a history, and before long it will be but a memory. But the Bodleian Library is, we hope and believe, secure for ever. Scholars will still go thither

for counsel and study until the end of time. They will still find inspiration and encouragement from the example of those who have sat beneath the same roof and turned over the same pages as it is now their privilege to do. And if for the accumulated rubble of three centuries there is no more space, that rubble can be carried out into the country, where it will presently be joined by the indiscriminate productions of our modern presses. Moreover, if among the new books of to-day are some which stand the test of time, then room can be found for them among the masterpieces treasured in the ancient building, just as pictures which have served their time in the gallery of the Luxembourg are sometimes promoted to the honour of the Louvre.

The Bolsheviks, who have declared a pitiless war upon all writers and all books which are tainted by "capitalism," will never be asked to face the difficulty which confronts Oxford and Cambridge. A small library should be sufficient to hold all the works in which is distilled the pure doctrine of Communism. And that pure doctrine supplies all their needs. The Russian Revolution, indeed, stands alone in waging war to the death against all those writers and men of science who do not subscribe to their gospel; and since they have but two arguments to use against their enemies, death and torture, the conflict with the intelligent classes in Russia has been brief and bloody. The Bolsheviks have slaughtered or starved to death artists and men of science. The attainments of scholars have mattered nothing to them, and since they have no pride in their country, made squalid by their pestilent heresies, they have not scrupled to wreak their vengeance on the most highly distinguished of their contemporaries. And now they are beginning to repent them of their brutality, not because their hearts are softened, but because they think it wise to make use of their wretched victims before they put them to death. As that unspeakable fanatic, Lenin, was compelled before his death to make concessions to capitalists, so the present masters of Moscow are relenting somewhat towards what they call technical specialists. In a programme for the Communists of the world, lately published in Moscow, the high executioners of the world, elected by themselves, utter a word of ominous caution. "Technical specialists," they say, "must not be destroyed indiscriminately, because it must not be forgotten that a constructive policy needs qualified guidance, but they must be watched very carefully." The Bolsheviks are neither humorous nor wise. Had they been given understanding, or were their dim souls illuminated by a spark of humour, they could not have authorised so foolish a statement. "Indiscriminately"

is a very good touch, as it implies that the mass of technical specialists will have short shrift. Those only will be spared who can do the work for which the Bolsheviks themselves are not qualified, and even then the poor specialists will be carefully watched. They will be set to work, so to say, with a noose round the neck of each, to be drawn tight at the least sign of recalcitrance. It may be objected that a "technical specialist" does not do his best work when he is threatened with the gallows or the torture-chamber. But the Bolsheviks cannot forgo the pleasure of Sadism, even if it costs them something in diminished profits. And they want not the credit which belongs to a genuine patronage of art or science. When we are told by their friends that they give greater encouragement to geologists than other countries, we may withhold our praise. For we know that they spare the lives of the miserable geologists only that they may find precious metals, which will enable them to carry on and to extend their campaign of bloodshed.

From several points of view their most recent manifesto is worth studying. Its simplicity and ignorance are precisely what we should expect. The Bolsheviks, absorbed in cruelty, cannot look abroad with understanding eyes. This is fortunate for us, since if they knew what was happening behind the wall of darkness which they have built to imprison Russia, they would be a far greater danger than they are. If only they recognised the eminent services performed for them by such pious Socialists as Messrs Macdonald, Shaw, Webb, and Henderson, they would not put their names upon the index. The "intellectual" Socialists are the Bolsheviks' best friends. They think it brave and bold to sing the praises of Lenin and the rest, and they give an air of respectability, which the Bolsheviks should not resent, to the basest movement of modern times. Above all, they are never tired of preaching to the monstrous text that "revolution" excuses the vilest of crimes. Not long since one Bela Kun, who under the pretext of being a revolutionary had committed the coarsest atrocities in Buda-Pesth and escaped to Russia, succeeded in smuggling himself back into Vienna to stir up trouble. His extradition was naturally demanded by Hungary, and some "intellectuals" among the English Socialists protested against his being handed over to justice, on the absurd plea that whatever crimes he committed were committed in a revolution. The plea is dangerous as well as absurd, since a revolution cannot easily be defined, and the most brutal burglar or assassin can, if this plea be allowed, justify his crimes by professing a set of foolish opinions. However, the Bolsheviks are nothing if not exclusive. They will put

all those who advocate peaceful methods under the ban, and now repeat their declaration that victory is possible in each country only by "violent destruction of the existing Government, Government machinery, army, police, law courts, and Parliament." We are grateful to them for their intransigence, for such a declaration as this makes their attempt to win a victory for their principles in England plainly impossible.

However, the Bolsheviks, completely ignorant of what is going on elsewhere, repeat their propaganda, as though the world had not already dismissed it from its mind. England, at any rate, is at last safe from their heresies and their bribes. Time was when Tomski was received with open arms, and when he was not permitted to land on these shores his astounding communications were read aloud not in ridicule, but with respect. At Scarborough once a congress of Trade Unionists presented him with a gold watch. They will give him and his friends no more gold watches. The evil work which the Minority Movement accomplished with the help of Russia has been discovered, and the Trade Unionists themselves will take care that it is not repeated. But news of their persistent failure does not reach the Bolsheviks in Russia. They still believe that they will secure the sovereignty of the world. They repeat their old message in its old jargon. Their latest programme, drawn up scarcely a month ago, might have been composed in the great days of Lenin and Trotsky, when hope was high and blood flowed freely. The masses of the world are still adjured to regard the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as their fatherland. The Communists of Europe and the United States are encouraged, when the hour strikes, "to confiscate factories, banks, railways, and church property." This is good for a beginning, and equally profitable is the command to repudiate all public debts and private debts to capitalists. When these orders have been obeyed, then the era of bloodshed may begin. The middle classes in every country must be ruthlessly destroyed, and after them must perish all loyal officers and high officials, with the exception of some few who may be spared as useful for their organising ability. When the Terror has done its work, the new Soviets will follow their usual routine. In the rural districts only must moderation be exercised. "Complete expropriation"—thus runs the precious document quoted by 'The Times'—"must proceed through several stages, because smallholders, especially in the most developed countries, have a deep-rooted feeling of possession, which it is impossible to remove before revolution is consolidated. Their markets and money system must also be left, and be temporarily and

gradually destroyed." It is well that one class remains, by the Bolsheviks' own confession, that is proof against the Terror. Thus is the way made clear for the new régime. The happy country which is able to progress so far is now ready for the iron tyranny, which is the logical consequence of revolution. "All Parties, except the Communist Party, must be prohibited"—thus it is ordained by the Communist International,—"and the Communist Party must take over and control the entire 'spiritual life' of the country, including a monopoly of all newspapers and printing presses, cinematographs and theatres." And the Soviet will take charge not only of what it calls the "spiritual life" of the country; it will control the arms as well as the arts. "The Soviet State," we are told, "presupposes the complete disarmament of the *bourgeoisie*, and the concentration of arms in the hands of the proletariat. It is the state of the armed proletariat." And it is clear that the dictatorship of the proletariat will not be exercised with gloved hands. It is to be, according to the amiable definition of the Bolsheviks, "a ruthless, bloody and bloodless, military and economic, administrative and educational war against all class enemies and ideas, the opinion of the people—religion, traditions, and principles."

One thing only we are not told: who will be the richer and the happier for all this policy of terror. Hitherto in Russia, where alone the experiment of the dominant proletariat has been tried, the consequences have been misery, disease, and famine. Russia, indeed, has set an example which no other country is likely to follow. Yet the Bolsheviks still repeat their programme of hate and blood, as though it were a record upon an old gramophone. They repeat it in vain; not by such aimless threats as these can they hope to make our flesh creep. At last, even their beneficiaries, the Trade Unions, have found them out; and this last programme of noisy ruthlessness is probably the last which even the Communist International itself, a body which inspires not fear but laughter, will be at the pains to issue.

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